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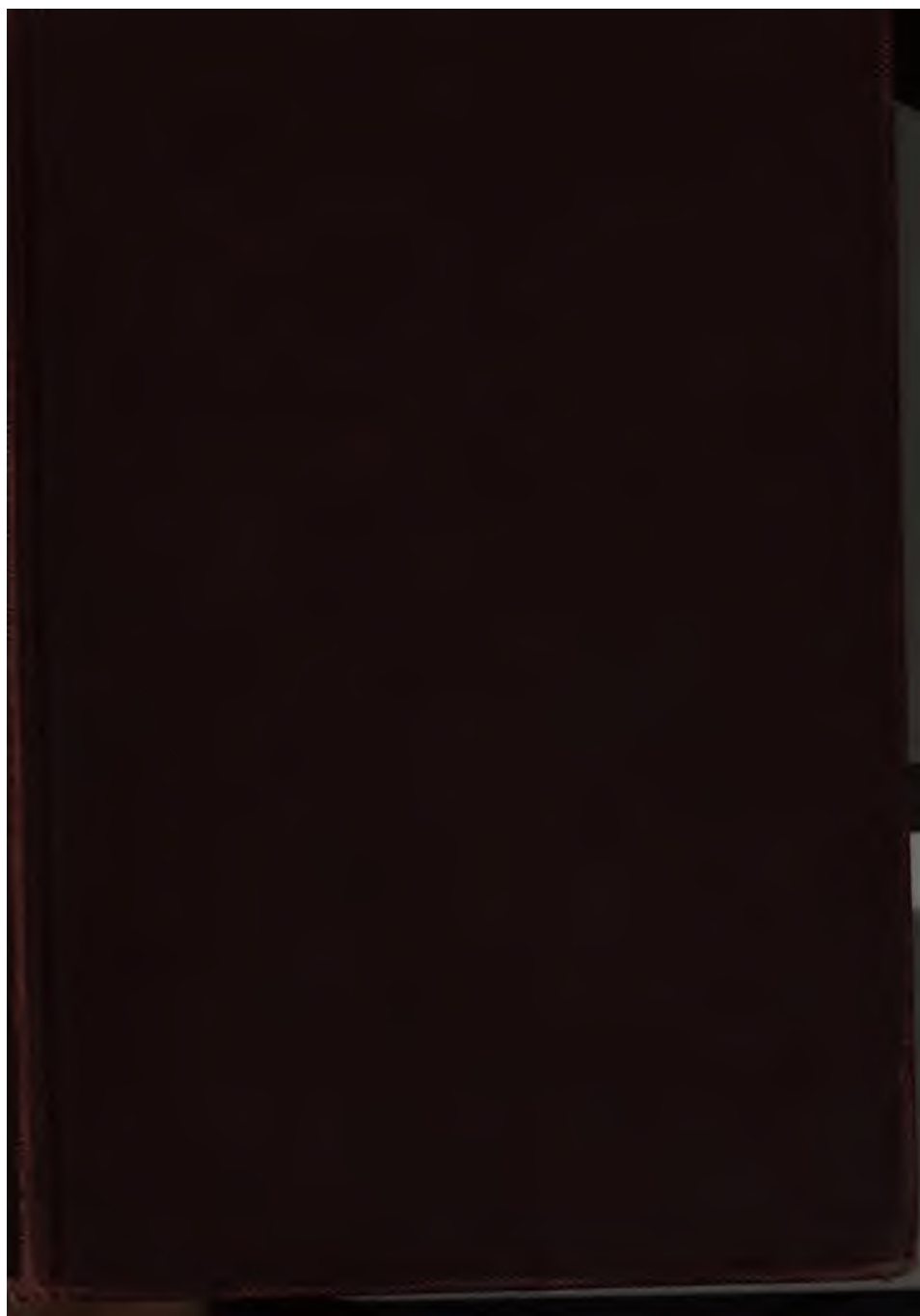
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THE
ART OF PLAYWRITING

BEING A PRACTICAL TREATISE ON THE
ELEMENTS OF DRAMATIC
CONSTRUCTION

INTENDED FOR THE PLAYWRIGHT, THE STUDENT,
AND THE DRAMATIC CRITIC

BY
ALFRED HENNEQUIN, PH.D.

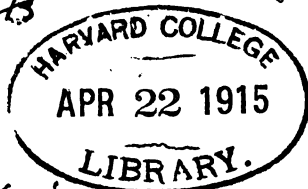


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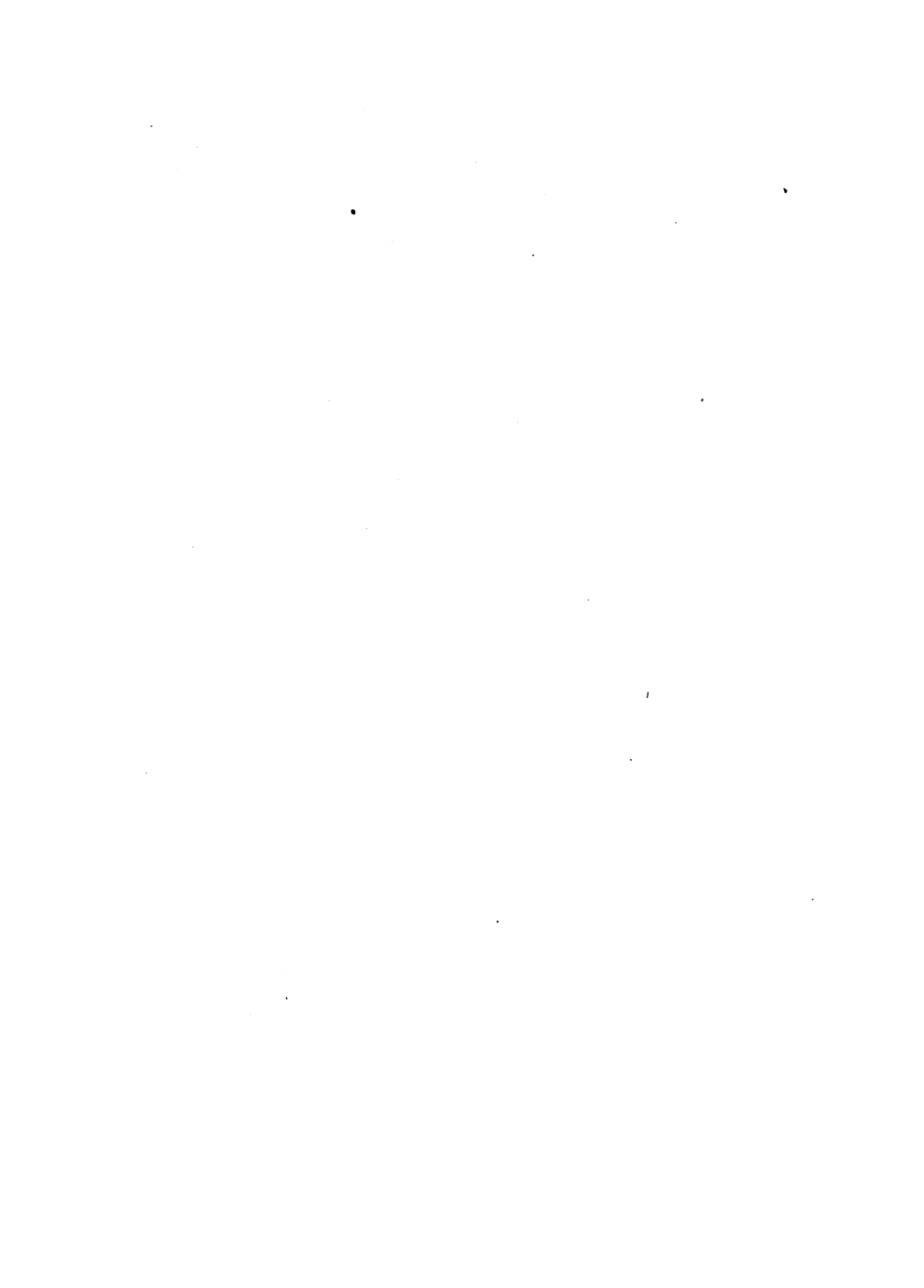
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To

BRONSON HOWARD,

**IN REMEMBRANCE OF A PLEASANT WINTER WHEN THE
SHENANDOAH WAS ON THE STOCKS.**

THE AUTHOR.



INTRODUCTION.

THERE are two classes of readers for whose needs a book of this sort should aim to provide: (1) those who know much about the practical workings of the theatre, but have little constructive knowledge; and (2) those whose instinct for dramatic construction is strong, but who, through lack of opportunity, have acquired little insight into the practical details of stage representation. With this end in view, the work has been arranged in two principal divisions, the first dealing with the minutiae of the theatre, the second with the principles of dramatic construction.

In the first the reader is inducted into the twilight region which lies beyond the scenes, told the name and function of the pieces of stage machinery, introduced to "wings," "flats," "set-pieces," "grooves," "tormentors," — taught the office of the various exits and entrances, initiated into the mysteries of stage conventionalities — in short, made acquainted with every feature of the modern stage which concerns him as a working playwright. In the second part, an endeavor is

made to set forth the theory and art of playwriting, first, by a thorough classification and analysis of the drama, and second, by a practical exposition of the actual process of building up a play from the first crude suggestion.

To very many readers doubtless an attempt to teach an art notoriously so subtle and complex as that of playwriting will seem like proposing a recipe for "Paradise Lost" or a formula for "The Mill on the Floss." They will say (and with much plausibility) that if playwriting is an art, its rules are airy, impalpable, elusive. To set them down in prosaic black and white is to imprison Ariel in the rived oak where he can no longer work his magic for us. The force of all this may be granted, and yet we may insist that there are special reasons why a work on playwriting, if properly conceived, should be entitled to greater consideration than one which pretends to explain the secrets of poetry or fiction. The poet or novelist is at arm's length from his audience. He has only to get his poem or novel into type and his thought is within reach of every man that reads. With the dramatist the case is far otherwise. Between him and his audience looms up a monstrous, unwieldy, mysterious instrument of interpretation, rusty with traditions, top-heavy with prejudices, stuffed to bursting with curious, antiquated, crazy machinery of which few know, or care

to know, the meaning. It is through this instrument — the theatre — that the dramatist must convey his conception to his hearers. No matter how brilliant his genius, how fertile his imagination, unless he has studied the intricacies of this ponderous machine his labor is likely to go for nothing. His play may be most delightful reading, but unless it will lend itself to the peculiar requirements of the stage it is not worth, for dramatic purposes, the paper it is written on.

Now there are three methods by which the beginner may acquire this knowledge. He may go on the stage; he may converse with actors and playwrights; he may have recourse to books. The first plan is unquestionably an excellent one. The young dramatist can spend a year in no more profitable way than as "walking-gentleman" in a traveling or stock company. By no other means is he likely to acquire so intimate a knowledge of the highways and by-ways of the world behind the scenes.

But there are two considerations which preclude the universal application of this method. In the first place, the young playwright may not know what to observe. He may never have learned that first great art — the art of seeing with his eyes open. That being the case, the time and perhaps money which he expends for his stage experience may be virtually thrown away; for the stage, while a good school for those who know how

to take advantage of its instruction, is one of the worst in the world for those who do not. Nowhere is the student unguided by sound principles more likely to acquire a taste for small theatrical artifices, hackneyed phrases and forced, unmeaning situations. As a proof that mere presence on the stage is not sufficient of itself to inculcate valid dramatic principles, any reader of plays could cite the case of hundreds of actors of the day whose familiarity with stage matters has become second nature, and who yet betray the most absolute misconception of the application of their technical knowledge to the business of playwriting.

But there is another and a less debatable objection to the stage as a dramatic educator. What this is, will appear as soon as we try to answer the question, Who writes plays? Upon this point, no one but a professional "reader" can pretend to furnish accurate statistics. It will be interesting, therefore, to quote a private letter to the author from one whose right to speak in matters of this kind cannot be called in question.

"There are *thousands* of plays written every year in this country. . . . It would be easier to enumerate the classes of those who do not write plays than of those who do. . . . We receive MSS. from journalists, novelists, dramatic critics, theatrical reporters, amateur performers, merchants, brokers, bankers, lawyers (not only the young and obscure but

those of almost national reputation), ladies of high social position, government clerks, army and navy officials, telegraph operators, college students, bookkeepers, typewriters, physicians, teachers in our public schools (of both sexes), professors in our leading universities, actors, theatrical managers and attachés, commercial travelers, musicians, painters, architects, engravers, ministers, politicians, congressmen, and members of the supreme bench of — I dare not say what States of the Union.”

Now in the majority of these cases it would be manifestly absurd to advise any going upon the stage. The humble government clerk desirous of eking out her meagre salary, the cripple and the invalid, alleviating the real tragedy of life by the ideal sorrows of imaginary characters, the hurried professional man and the harried journalist, — all these are alike debarred from the means of acquiring the needed information. Nor in many instances is it practicable for those of the classes named to consult with dramatists or actors regarding the rules and requirements of stage representation.

It is upon books, we must then conclude, that the great army of those who experiment at playwriting — the army from whose ranks our professional playwrights are largely drawn — is dependent for whatever instruction it may get regarding the art of writing plays for the stage. For English and American readers such books are practically non-

existent. There is no one work, at any rate, in the English language or any other tongue (as far as the author's experience goes) which pretends to have gathered together all available information on the subject. A real deficiency seems, therefore, to exist, and it is with the purpose of supplying this deficiency that the present work has been written. As to the old question, How much benefit may a writer derive from books on writing? — that is a discussion which may be set aside simply because it is old. No great author was ever hurt by the study of the principles of rhetoric, and no small author ever achieved success without such study. Although no book of this sort is able to supply the dramatic faculty where it is absolutely wanting, or likely to aid materially the creative processes of strong natural genius, it may yet be the means of leading to the achievement of no inconsiderable number of smaller successes, and so accomplish what is, after all, the only hope of the drama in this country, — the raising of the general average of dramatic workmanship.

It may be said, in conclusion, that there are many persons beside those who have felt the actual need of a book of this kind, for whom the study of dramatic art (even if limited to construction) will be found of profit. The dramatic critic, indeed, finds it altogether indispensable; but to any one who is at all interested in the study of literature, and

especially of the drama, it may be recommended as one of the most interesting and delightful fields for investigation which it is possible for him to cultivate.

In the preparation of this work, the author has received assistance and suggestions from so many playwrights, actors, managers and literary men that he can find space here only to make a general acknowledgment. It would be ungrateful in him, however, to pass by without special mention the great obligations under which he rests, to that prince of gentlemen and first of American dramatists, Mr. Bronson Howard, to Mr. A. M. Palmer, manager of the Madison Square Theatre, to Mr. Louis Ludovici, "reader" of the Madison Square Theatre, to Mrs. "Minnie Maddern" Fiske, and — last but by no means least — to Madame Janauschek. It is a pleasure also to refer to many kindly favors shown him by the late A. S. Cazauran, although the ears that should hear these thanks have long been closed to the things of this world.

Finally, the author wishes to acknowledge a very considerable indebtedness to Mr. F. N. Scott, Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and lecturer on *Æsthetics* in the University of Michigan, of whose wide scholarship in matters pertaining to literature, art, and the drama he has freely availed himself.

ALFRED HENNEQUIN.

ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN, *July*, 1890.

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THE ART OF PLAYWRITING.

CHAPTER I.

THE THEATRE STAFF.

1. Officers and Attachés. — The organization of every well-equipped theatre includes the following officers and attachés.

The Officers are : —

(1.) **THE MANAGER.** The manager has general charge and oversight of the theatre; attends to the engagement of the company, if the theatre supports a *stock-company*,¹ to the *booking of companies*,² and — what is of most consequence to the playwright — decides upon the acceptance of plays submitted to the theatre.

(2.) **THE ASSISTANT-MANAGER.** In the largest theatres there is usually an assistant-manager who transacts routine business, and whose principal duties consist in superintending the minor details of the general management.

¹ See Chapter xiv. 5.

² Arranging for dates when companies shall produce their plays.

Every company *on the road*¹ is accompanied and managed by a *road-manager*. These managers either attend to the production of plays as a personal speculation, negotiating with authors for the sale of plays or the right to produce the same on certain conditions, or simply manage the general business of *stars*,² or of traveling stock-companies.

(3.) THE TREASURER. The treasurer has charge of all the moneys received or expended by the theatre. His principal function, however, is the control of the *box-office*,³ and the accounting to the manager of the amount received, after each performance of a play.

(4.) THE STAGE-MANAGER. This important functionary has entire and supreme control of the stage during the *rehearsal*⁴ and production of a play. He personally superintends rehearsals, attending to every detail, — the movements and the grouping of the actors for *situations*, *scenes*, or *tableaus*,⁵ the arrangement of the general *stage-settings*,⁶ the preparing of *scene-plots*⁷ and of *property-plots*,⁸ etc., etc.

¹ A traveling company producing one or more plays throughout the country.

² See Chapter xiii. 5.

³ Frequently called the ticket-office.

⁴ The recital and preparing of a play for its public production.

⁵ See Chapter x. 6.

⁶ See Chapter iii. 12.

⁷ See Chapter iii. 10.

⁸ See Chapter iii. 11.

A good stage-manager has almost as much to do with the success of a play as the actors themselves.

All stock-company theatres employ a stage-manager. Theatres that simply do the booking of traveling companies have a *local* stage-manager, whose duties are more limited, and who, alone or in connection with the visiting stage-manager, prepares the stage for the production of the play to be given.

(5.) **THE READER.** Some of the metropolitan theatres that are in the habit of bringing out original plays employ a professional *reader*¹ of plays, who examines all the manuscripts submitted to the theatre, rejects those that are hopelessly inferior, and recommends to the manager's attention such as are available, or can be made so by revision.

2. The Attachés. — Persons of lesser importance connected with the theatre are : —

(1.) **THE PROPERTY-MAN.** The business of the property-man is to care for all the articles, miscellaneous objects of all kinds, furniture, appendages, etc., known as *properties*,² used in the production of plays.

(2.) **THE FLY-MAN.** The fly-man attends to the shifting and dropping of such scenery as can be handled from the *rigging-loft*, or *flies*.³

¹ All manuscripts should be sent to the reader. If a play is rejected by him, an appeal to the manager is useless.

² See Chapter ii. 11. ³ See Chapter ii. 3, (4) and (5).

(3.) **THE GAS-MAN.** The gas-man regulates the light on the stage and in the auditorium during the production of a play.

The term is still retained, in spite of the fact that electricity has, in many theatres, taken the place of gas as a means of illumination.

(4.) **THE SCENE-SHIFTER.** The scene-shifter handles such scenery as can be moved in the *wings*.¹

(5.) **THE STAGE-CARPENTER.** The stage-carpenter, besides doing the general construction and repairing of the stage and the appurtenances, has special duties during the progress of the play. He attends to the mechanical details of the stage-setting, such as the building up of elaborate set-pieces,² runs,³ stairways, etc., to the movement of machinery representing waves, moving vessels and the like, and is constantly on hand in the wings to superintend the shifting of complicated scenery.

(6.) **THE TICKET-TAKER.** The ticket-taker attends to the taking of the tickets at the entrance of the auditorium, and accounts to the treasurer after the performance.

(7.) **THE BACKDOOR-KEEPER.** The back-door-keeper guards all the entrances to the

¹ See Chapter ii. 7.

² See Chapter iii. 5.

³ See Chapter iii. 9.

stage (but especially what is known as the *stage entrance* ¹), during the performance.

(8.) THE HEAD-USHER. The head-usher and his assistants seat the audience.

(9.) THE DIRECTOR OF THE ORCHESTRA. The director of the orchestra has charge of the orchestra, and consults with the stage-manager about the music to be played during the performance, in accordance with certain *cues*.²

¹ The entrance admitting the actors to the stage without passing through the auditorium.

² The last word of a speech which a player is to answer. A *music cue* is taken up by the orchestra as it would be on the stage by an actor.

CHAPTER II.

THE STAGE.

1. The Boards. — In a limited sense, the word *stage* signifies the floor, or the boards, on which theatrical performances are exhibited, as distinct from the auditorium ; hence the expression *to go on the boards*, meaning to become an actor.

2. The Stage. — In its more extended meaning the word stage is applied to all that region which lies back of the *proscenium*,¹ of which space the visible stage occupies but a very small portion.

3. Parts of the Stage. — The stage has some *nine* distinct parts, as follows : —

(1.) The *stage proper*, where the action of the play takes place.

(2.) The *proscenium*, the frontispiece, or front part of the stage, *i. e.*, all that is left exposed to the view of the audience when the curtain is down.

(3.) The *wings*, a series of chambers or platforms on each side of the stage proper.

(4.) The *flies*, the space above the curtain and extending over the whole of the stage.

¹ See this chapter, farther on, 3, (2).

(5.) The *rigging-loft*, the same space occupied by the flies, but considered with particular reference to the machinery contained in it.

(6.) The *dock*, the space under the whole area of the stage-floor.

(7.) The *green-room*, a survival of the old *tireynge-house*, or *tireynge-room*, where the actors assemble, awaiting the time for the performance to begin, or to which they retire when not needed on the stage.

The popular conception of the green-room as a sort of promiscuous dressing-room is absurdly fallacious.

(8.) The *property-room*, where are kept the miscellaneous objects used on the stage, excepting scenery and sets of furniture.

(9.) The *dressing-rooms*, where the performers dress for and during the performance of the play.

4. The Stage Proper. — The action of the play usually takes place on the floor called the stage proper. This floor slopes upwards and away from the audience, thus gaining the effect of foreshortening, and so appearing deeper than it really is.

5. The Stage-Cloth. — The floor of the stage proper is usually covered with a green cloth, unless other furnishing, such as carpets, rugs, etc., are called for by the play. When the cloth is to be used, the technical expression *cloth down* should be inserted in the manuscript at the beginning of the act.

6. The Proscenium.—The proscenium varies in size in different theatres, being sometimes reduced to a mere strip not a yard in width. On the side nearest the audience are the *foot-lights*, a series of lights casting a powerful reflection on the lower part of the stage. Though foot-lights are still in common use, different and better systems of lighting up the stage have of late been devised.

The proscenium in many metropolitan theatres has on each side one or more series of *boxes*, i. e. seats inclosed so as to form small private parlors overlooking the stage.

In front of the foot-lights and below the level of the stage is seated the orchestra, the *conductor's* seat being on a platform elevated above the seats of the rest of the orchestra. Various mechanical and other devices are now in use for concealing the orchestra either in a portion of the dock or in the flies.

7. The Wings.—The space on each side of the stage, from the side walls of the theatre to the scenery when set up for a play, is called the wings. The space in the wings varies according to the amount of actual space required for the performance of the play.

In most theatres, the greater part of the scenery is kept in the wings or *at back*, i. e., against the back wall of the stage.

There is a tendency in the larger theatres to do away with the storing of scenery in the wings, all or most of the different pieces of

scenery being made to ascend from the dock, or to descend from the flies.

8. The Flies. — In the larger theatres, the flies take up the greater portion of the stage, not only extending over the whole region, but going up several stories to fully double the height of the proscenium arch.

In the flies are found the rows of windlasses, rigging, etc., used for the raising or lowering of the scenery. The parts of the flies occupied by this machinery are termed the rigging-loft.

9. The Dock. — The region under the stage called the dock is also, in the largest theatres, divided into several stories by successive floors. Here is found the machinery for operating the *traps*,¹ raising and lowering scenery through the stage, etc.

10. The Green-Room. — The green-room is a luxury not always found in smaller theatres; and even in larger theatres, private parlors connected with the dressing-rooms are preferred to one larger room, some theatres combining both.

11. The Property-Room. — The property-room is a repository for the innumerable objects handled, sat on, broken, thrown about, or pointed at during the progress of the play. Here are to be found Hamlet's "recorders," Shylock's knife, Juliet's vial of poison, Prospero's wand, Richelieu's manuscript, the

¹ See this chapter, farther on, 13.

brass money that Armand flings at Camille, and the tin dagger with which Brutus stabs Cæsar, — not to mention rubber turkeys, pasteboard beakers, papier-maché legs-of-mutton, and all the rest of the realistic though deceptive articles that go to make up the customary stage banquet.

It is well for the playwright to remember that in most of the smaller theatres the list of *properties* includes only the articles most commonly used upon the stage. Costly properties, or articles that are hard to obtain outside of large cities, should, if possible, be avoided.

12. The Dressing-Rooms. — The dressing-rooms are located where they will occupy the least possible space. While in many of the larger theatres these rooms are actual boudoirs, easy of access from the stage, in most of the smaller ones they are bare, carpetless boxes, situated without regard to the actor's convenience, in the flies, in the dock, on the side of the stage, or midway between the floor and the rigging-loft.

13. The Traps. — The traps are holes cut through the stage-floor, and furnished with apparatus by means of which an actor may be slowly or rapidly elevated from below to the level of the stage, or in the same manner lowered from the stage into the dock.

It is impossible to go into details regarding the different kinds of traps. Some of the modern stages are literally honeycombed with

them, so that in any quarter of the stage there can be made to open a hole just large enough to admit a gas-pipe, or a gaping chasm capable of swallowing up a (canvas) city.

The term trap is also applied to openings cut in the scenery for the sudden appearance or disappearance of performers.

14. Dimensions of the Stage. — Stages are of various dimensions, according to whether they are built for general or special purposes. Stages that have neither complete rigging-lofts nor docks are not well adapted to the production of *spectacular* plays.¹

The dimensions of the smaller theatres throughout the country will average about as follows : —

- (1.) Width of stage, including wings . . 65 ft.
- (2.) Depth from the foot-lights to back
wall of stage 30 ft.
- (3.) Height of rigging-loft 40 ft.
- (4.) Space above rigging-loft 5 ft.

Theatres of the above dimensions seldom have a dock of more than one story.

¹ See Chapter viii. 11.

CHAPTER III.

THE SCENERY.

1. Stage Scenery. — The various paintings or other representations of inanimate nature required for the production of a play — excepting what comes under the head of properties and furniture — constitute the scenery.

As it is not within the scope of this book to describe in detail the different kinds of scenery used for theatrical performances, this chapter will deal only with such features of the subject as are of special interest to the dramatist.

2. Different kinds of Scenery. — There are *four* important kinds of scenery : —

- (1.) The drops.
- (2.) The flats and wood-cuts.
- (3.) The set-pieces.
- (4.) The borders.

3. The Drops. — The drops are usually painted canvases let down from the flies. Since they have no wooden frames, they are often termed *cloths*.

The principal cloths are : —

(1.) The *green curtain*, lowered when the play is over.¹

(2.) The *front curtain*, or *act drop*, which is down until the play opens, and is lowered at the end of each act.

(3.) *Back*, or *scene cloths*, lowered at various distances from the front, usually to represent the vista of exteriors.

4. **The Flats and Wood-cuts.** — Under the heads of flats and wood-cuts come all structures of canvas stretched tightly on wooden frames.

In the larger theatres, flats are usually made of one piece, arranged so as to be let down from the flies like drops, or pushed up from the docks. When removed, they are said to be *whipped off*.

In most theatres, flats are made in two corresponding pieces intended to be pushed out in the *grooves*² from the wings, and to join in the middle so as to form one continuous scene.

Wood-cuts are structures of canvas stretched on wooden frames, cut so as to represent ornamental pieces, such as arches, trees, etc. They have a variety of other names, as *cut-woods*, *side-scenes*, and *wing-cuts*.

In *exteriors*,³ where they are mostly used, they form the scenery visible on each side of

¹ Most theatres have no green curtain.

² See this chapter, farther on, 8.

³ See Chapter vi. 1.

14 THE ART OF PLAYWRITING.

the stage, constituting the various *entrances*¹ to the stage proper.

5. The Set-pieces. — A set-piece is a structure built out from a flat, or standing isolated on the stage.

Among the many different set-pieces the ones most commonly used are: —

- (1.) Set houses.
- (2.) Set trees.
- (3.) Set rocks.
- (4.) Set mounds.
- (5.) Set water.

Everything on the stage that can actually be used is called *practicable* (sometimes shortened to *practical*). Thus a set house is practicable if it can be used as an *enter* or *exit*; ² a window, if it can be opened and shut; a mound, if it can be used as a seat, etc. In set houses one window and one door are usually made practicable, the rest being merely painted.

6. The Borders. — The borders comprise the scenery let down from the flies to a point just below the level of the proscenium arch, so as to conceal the rigging-loft. They are used to represent clouds, the sky, ceilings, tops of trees, etc., and are called *cut-borders* when they allow objects behind to be seen through them. Cut-borders are usually tree-tops.

¹ See Chapter vi. plan No. 1.

² See Chapter xi. and xii., also plan 1, Chapter vi.

7. A Bunch-light. — A bunch-light is formed by a number of lights bunched together, supported by a rod and placed wherever necessary. When a "calcium" is necessary, the gas-man is told to "get his calcium on." These lights are used to produce certain stage effects, such as moonlight through windows, etc.

8. The Grooves. — The side-scenes (themselves sometimes called *wings*) when pushed out from the sides of the stage, are supported at the top by a series of grooves built out from the rigging-loft, and at the bottom by a similar series constructed on the floor of the stage. Scenery thus shifted is said to be *run on*. Sets of grooves vary in number from four to six.

9. A Run. — A run is a wooden inclined plane coming down towards the front of the stage. A run is always practicable.

10. A Scene-Plot. — A scene-plot is the plan, or prepared appearance, on paper, of the stage when all the scenery has been located for an act or scene. It also includes the location of all the furniture needed for the action of the play in each act or scene.

11. A Property-Plot. — A property-plot is a list of the various articles required in each act.

12. The Setting of a Play. — The setting of a play consists in preparing the scene-plots for each act, scene, or tableau, and also making out the list for the property-plots.

CHAPTER IV.

STAGE DIRECTIONS.

1. Lines and Business. — The following passage from Bronson Howard's *Saratoga* will be used to illustrate what we have to say under this head : —

[*Enter Lucy L. 2 E. rapidly.*]

Lucy. Effie — Virginia — Mrs. Alston !

Effie. Oh — Virginia — Lucy — Olivia !

[*Ladies moving to and fro.*]

Mrs. Alston. Oh — Jack — my dear Jack — My first love ! [*Sinks into a chair, C.*]

Virginia. Frank — my last love ! [*Sinks beside her, L.*]

Lucy. My husband ! [*Sinks beside her, R.*]

Effie. [*Standing back of her chair, C.*] Robert !!
J'aime que toi — my only love !

[*Ladies all choke, and then burst into simultaneous sobs.*]

Tableau.

Curtain.

2. Analysis of the Illustration. — A brief examination will show that the above extract is made up of two kinds of matter : —

(1.) The words that are put into the mouths of the characters.

(2.) The various directions, such as *enter*, *sinks into a chair*, etc.

3. The Lines. — The first are technically known as the lines, that is, the dialogue.

4. The Business. — The second, called the business of the play, includes all movements, gestures, inarticulate utterances, etc., with which the actor accompanies the "reading" (*i. e.*, the speaking) of the lines.

Only the most essential business need be indicated in the manuscript. Much will be implied in the wording of the lines; still more must be left to the option of the actor. It is a rule, however, that all the *exits* and *enters*¹ should be carefully inserted at the proper points in the lines.

Stage directions is a wider term than business, including movements of *scenery*² and stage appendages; as, *e. g.*, the word "curtain" at the close of the passage quoted.

5. Kinds of Business. — The amount of business deemed necessary to be inserted in the manuscript varies greatly with different playwrights. The following classification includes the most essential business of a play:

- (1.) Location of characters at rise.
- (2.) Enters and exits.
- (3.) Location of characters during the act.
- (4.) Incidents of the play.
- (5.) Location of characters at "curtain."

6. At Rise. — Characters on the stage at the moment the curtain rises, are said to be *discovered at rise*. It is usual to indicate at

¹ See Chapters xi. and xii.

² See Chapter iii.

the beginning of the act whatever is peculiar in their positions or occupations. For example, at the opening of the third act of *London Assurance*, Max and Sir Harcourt, Dazzle, Grace and Charles Courtly are discovered at rise.

The stage directions run : —

"Max and Sir Harcourt seated at one side, Dazzle on the other. Grace and young Courtly playing chess at back."

7. Enters and Exits. — The exact moment at which each character comes on or goes off the stage must be carefully indicated by the terms *enter* or *exit* (plural *exeunt*) inserted at the appropriate point in the lines or the other stage directions.¹

8. Location of Characters during the act. — Every significant action of the characters during the act should be indicated in the manuscript. Further, it is often desirable to point out the exact location on the stage at which the action takes place.

There are two methods of doing this : —

(1.) By reference to objects upon the stage, as tables, chairs, scenery, the other characters, etc.

(2.) By means of conventional abbreviations referring to particular portions of the stage itself.

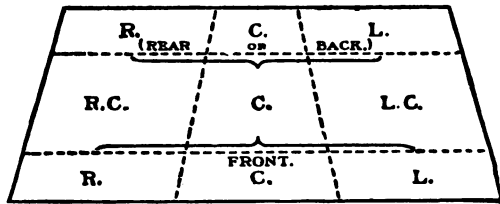
The first method requires no explanation.

¹ For further treatment of this important topic, see Chapters xi. and xii.

If a character is to hide behind a piano or mount a table, the stage directions will be "*hides behind piano*," "*jumps on table*," etc.

If the exact position with reference to the object is of importance, it should be included in the stage direction, as: "*stands at left of table*," "*leans over gate*," etc.

The terms used in referring to particular portions of the stage, together with the common abbreviations, are given in the following tables and diagrams: —

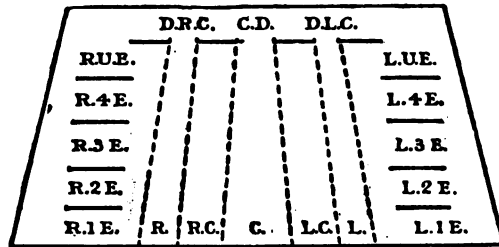


9. Meaning of Abbreviations. — In plays actually intended for the stage, abbreviations only are used.

C.	.	.	.	.	.	.	Centre.
R.	.	.	.	.	.	.	Right.
L.	.	.	.	.	.	.	Left.
R. C.	.	.	.	.	.	.	Right centre.
L. C.	.	.	.	.	.	.	Left centre.

The words *Rear* (or *Back*) and *Front* are always written in full.

10. **Plan with Entrances.** — The stage is further subdivided as shown in the following plan : —



11. **Meaning of Abbreviations.** — The word *entrance* signifies the place at which a character may make his appearance on the stage from the rear (or back) or from the wings.

C. D.	. . . .	Centre door.
D. R. C.	. . . .	Door right of centre.
D. L. C.	. . . .	Door left of centre.
R. 1 E.	. . . .	Right first entrance.
R. 2 E.	. . . .	Right second entrance.
R. 3 E.	. . . .	Right third entrance.
R. 4 E.	. . . .	Right fourth entrance.
R. U. E.	. . . .	Right upper entrance.
L. 1 E.	. . . .	Left first entrance.
L. 2 E.	. . . .	Left second entrance.
L. 3 E.	. . . .	Left third entrance.
L. 4 E.	. . . .	Left fourth entrance.
L. U. E.	. . . .	Left upper entrance.

Combining the two plans, the following

abbreviations and stage directions can be used : —

R. rear, or back.

L. rear, or back.

R. C. rear, or back.

C. rear, or back.

R. front.

L. front.

L. C. front.

C. front.

By comparing the two plans, it will be noticed that the right and left are subdivided into right center and left center.

12. The Tormentors. — The first entrances, right and left, are called the tormentors. Some writers, however, use 1 E. for the first entrance back of the tormentor.

Very few plays require more than *five* entrances from the wing. The upper entrances are usually the fourth entrances, for full stage.

The terms right and left are taken sometimes from the actor's right and left hand as he faces the audience, sometimes from the right and left hand of the spectator. The former is the prevailing custom.

Sometimes P. (Prompter's side) is used for right, and O. P. (opposite Prompter's side) for left.

13. Movement of Characters during the Act. — Certain movements of characters on the stage are designated as follows : —

(1.) To go up.

(2.) To come down.

(3.) To cross over.

14. Going up. — When a character moves towards the back of the stage, he is said to go up.

15. Coming down. — When a character moves towards the foot-lights, he is said to come down.

16. Crossing over. — When a character goes from one side of the stage to the other, he is said to cross over.

These terms may be combined with the abbreviations given above to denote the part of the stage at which the movement takes place, for example : —

(1.) Coming down C. means moving towards the front through the centre of the stage.

(2.) Going up R. means moving towards the rear on the right hand side.

(3.) Crosses over R. means that the character is to move towards the right hand side.

(4.) Crosses over L. C. means that the character moves from right to left centre.

17. Exercise in Stage Movements. — The student will find the working out of the following directions, with the aid of the diagrams, an excellent method of familiarizing himself with the foregoing terms and abbreviations : —

A. and B. represent two characters.

A. and B. discovered at rise.

A. sitting at L. of table R. C.

B. standing at R. of desk near L. 3 E.

A. rises and crosses over to L. C.

B. comes down L.

A. and B. go up to L. U. E.

A. and B. cross over to R. 3 E.

A. goes up to D. C.

B. comes down R.

A. comes down to L. 1 E.

B. crosses over to L.

A. and B. cross over to R. 1 E.

A. goes up to D. L. C.

B. crosses over and goes up to L. 3 E.

A. and B. come down C.

A. and B. go up, A. L. and B. R.

Exeunt A. and B., A. D. L. C., B. D. R. C.

18. Incidents.—Almost every significant event that takes place in the course of a play will call for some stage direction. Especially is this the case when several characters are supposed to do the same thing simultaneously. Of this class are the expressions, "ladies moving to and fro,"—"ladies all choke," etc., in the passage above quoted. As the number of things that may happen on the stage is practically infinite, no general rules can be given.

The beginner should be cautioned against cumbering his manuscript with detailed descriptions, or with directions for trivial and unimportant actions.

19. Minor Business.—Among the less

important stage directions may be reckoned those pertaining to : —

- (1.) Asides and Apart^s.¹
- (2.) Dumb show.
- (3.) Quick, slow, and half-slow curtain.
- (4.) Change of scene, whistle scene, etc.
- (5.) Music.
- (6.) Lights up.
- (7.) Lights down.
- (8.) Noises outside.
- (9.) Gestures.
- (10.) Facial expression.
- (11.) Tone of voice.

Of these the first is indispensable, the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth, almost so. All of these should be incorporated in the manuscript. The rest must be left to the discretion of the playwright, who may, in most instances, save time and labor, by leaving them in turn to the imagination of the actor.

¹ See Chapter *xxii*. 15 and 16.

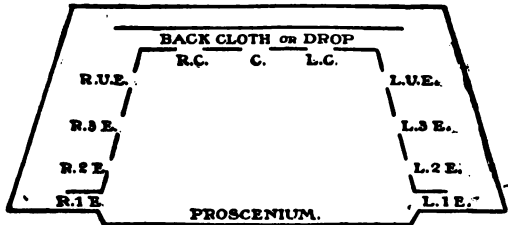
CHAPTER V.

STAGE PLANS.

1. **Interiors.** — In stage language an *interior* means an in-door scene.

The plans given below are subject to numerous modifications, according to the nature of the interior called for by the play.

PLAN No. 1.



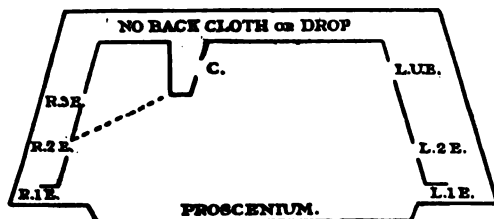
The terms right and left, as used in these plans, are taken with reference to one standing on the stage and facing the audience.

2. **Doors and Windows.** — In the above plan the entrances can be either doors or windows. In the proper sense of the word, a window is not an entrance, though it may be used to enter or leave the stage.

3. Number of Entrances.—The tormentors, *i. e.*, the entrances R. 1 E. and L. 1 E., do not form a part of the room proper, and are used exclusively for enters and exits.

The three entrances at rear are usually doors. If the plan calls for a number of windows, they will be marked as windows in the stage-setting. For example, if the L. 3 E. is a window, the description will read as follows: *Doors L. 1, 2 & U. E.; window L. 3 E.*

PLAN No. 2.



4. Plan with Run.—In Plan No. 2, the space between R. 2 E. and flat near C. is a *run*. The dotted line shows where the run joins the stage. At the back is a flat from which a set scene, with door at C., projects upon the stage. The run may be used for the following purposes:—

- (1.) It may be a glimpse into a conservatory.
- (2.) It may be a stairway with adjoining hall.

(3.) It may be a small boudoir with a few steps leading to it.

A small recess in an interior should always be a run, or be elevated above the main floor of the stage.

What has been said of Plan No. 1 will also apply to Plan No. 2.

Back or side cloths in interiors are intended to conceal the walls of the stage.

A great number of plans for interiors should be drawn by the student, bearing the following rules in mind : —

(a.) Reception or ball rooms require the full stage, with three large entrances at back.

(b.) Rooms in which the action of the play requires the presence of several characters should be set from 1 E. to 3 E.

(c.) No interior — excepting for short scenes¹ — should be limited to 1 E.

(d.) Interiors for small parlor, laborer's cottage, boudoir, etc., should be set between 1 E. and 2 E.

(e.) Arches and portières should always be practicable, unless a portière is intended as a hiding-place only.

(f.) Avoid using the tormentors, as they lead to nowhere.

(g.) Let the student "furnish" the above interiors, thus preparing *scene-plots*.²

¹ See Chapter xxii. 6.

² Directions for scene-plots will be given at the end of the next chapter.

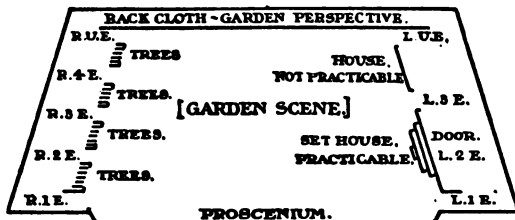
CHAPTER VI.

STAGE PLANS (*continued*).

1. **Exteriors.** — An *exterior* is an out-door scene.

The plans given below are very elementary. Stage-settings for exteriors can be very elaborate, representing not only street and garden scenes, but ocean and mountain pictures, with many practicable features.

PLAN No. 1.



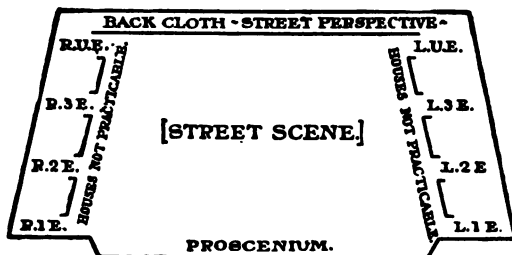
2. **General Remarks.** — The two exteriors represented in these plans differ in many respects. The following are the principal points the student should notice: —

- (1.) Both settings have back cloths.
- (2.) Plan No. 1, at left, has two houses, one of which is a set house with practicable door.

(3.) Plan No. 2, at right and left, has rows of houses, none of which are practicable.

(4.) Plan No. 1, at right, has no flats, the trees between the entrances being wood-cuts pushed on the stage from the wings.

PLAN No. 2.



3. Additional Abbreviations for Stage-Settings. — The student being now familiar with elementary stage-settings, may, if he chooses, make use of the following abbreviations in the stage directions : —

D. F., door in flat running back of stage.

C. D. F., centre door in the flat.

R. D. F., right door in the flat.

L. D. F., left door in the flat.

R. D., right door.

L. D., left door.

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, G., 1st, 2d, 3d, 4th, 5th groove.

4. Material for Scene-Plots for the above Interiors and Exteriors. — Let the student refer back to plan No. 1 (interior), and

locate in the stage-setting the different pieces of furniture mentioned below : —

FOR INTERIOR PLAN No. 1.

- (1.) C., large table.
- (2.) R. of table, arm-chair.
- (3.) L. of table, two chairs.
- (4.) In flats between R. C. and C., and C. and L. C., small stands.
- (5.) In flat L. 2 E., fireplace.
- (6.) In flat R. 2 E., sofa.
- (7.) L. C. towards front, settee.
- (8.) R. C. towards rear, screen.
- (9.) L. C. rear corner, easel with picture.
- (10.) R. C. front, near C., piano.

FOR INTERIOR PLAN No. 2.

- (1.) In flat, at back, from C. to L. (in the centre), grate, with ornamental mantelpiece.
- (2.) At both ends of said flat, large arm-chairs.
- (3.) In run, between R. 2 E. and flat standing out from R. C. back, shrubs, flowers, etc.
- (4.) In flat L. 2 E., piano with stool in front of it.
- (5.) R. C. front, small table.
- (6.) R. of table, chair.
- (7.) R. 3 E., screen seen among the flowers.
- (8.) On the run R. 3 E., statues seen amid the shrubs.
- (9.) C. towards left, sofa.
- (10.) Chairs near R. 1 E. and L. 1 E.

FOR EXTERIOR PLAN No. 1.

- (1.) From R. U. E. to L. U. E. at back, a low stone wall, with gate in centre.
- (2.) In front of set house L. 2 E., mat and carpet going up the steps.
- (3.) Near R. 2 E., garden bench.
- (4.) At R. of bench, garden chair.
- (5.) R. C. near back, large set tree.
- (6.) Set trees, or shrubs, L. C. near L. 3 E.

FOR EXTERIOR PLAN No. 2.

- (1.) Small fountain near R. 2 E.
- (2.) Vender's stall near L. 3 E.
- (3.) C., large lamp-post.
- (4.) Signs, hanging from houses, L. and R.
- (5.) Set trees before houses, in flats R. 1 E. and R. U. E.

5. Property Plots. — Let the student read one act of any play and make out a property plot of the act, by enumerating every object mentioned as present during the entire act.

CHAPTER VII

DIFFERENT KINDS OF PLAYS.

Tragedy.

1. No Systematic Classification. No satisfactory method of classifying the drama is in existence among English-speaking peoples. For the working playwright this is perhaps of no very serious consequence. If his play is a success, it matters little to him what name is applied to it. Nevertheless, occasions arise when even the playwright would find it convenient to indicate the character of his production by a single word instead of by a long circumlocution; while for critic and manager the defect is a matter of never-ceasing embarrassment and perplexity.

2. Two Principal Classes. — The growth of the drama in all civilized countries has resulted in the development of two classes of plays, distinguished by certain general marks of divergence. One class deals with the serious aspects of life, and is called *tragedy*; the other with the laughable aspects, and is called *comedy*.

In the early history of the stage, while the dramatic forms were simple and criticism as

yet undeveloped, the terms above given could be used with accuracy and significance; but as the development of the drama continued, the two classes showed a tendency, in some cases, to merge one into the other, until the distinction lost much of its earlier importance, while the rise of formal criticism created arbitrary standards where no essential distinction existed. To illustrate: the tragedies of Æschylus deal solely with the serious side of life, the comedies of Aristophanes, solely with its follies. In the tragedies of Shakespeare we find abundance of comedy, and in his comedies, especially in the *Merchant of Venice*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, and *As You Like It*, scenes that might well form part of tragedy. For examples of the influence of criticism in giving arbitrary names, mention may be made of Dante's *Divina Commedia* and Corneille's *Le Cid*.

3. The Distinction Valuable. — Notwithstanding the truth of the facts just stated, the traditional distinction between tragedy and comedy must always be a valuable one for the critic. In the first place, it is a natural distinction, a direct result of the two-fold character of life itself; and in the second place, it is already thoroughly impressed upon the popular consciousness. Whatever classifications are made, therefore, it will be advisable to use the common division into comedy and tragedy as a convenient starting-point for the discussion.

4. **Different Classes of Plays.** — The different kinds of plays which will be treated in this chapter are the following :¹ —

- (1.) Tragedy.
- (2.) Comedy.
- (3.) The *drame*, or *Schauspiel*.
- (4.) The *pièce*.
- (5.) The emotional drama.
- (6.) The melodrama.
- (7.) The spectacular drama.
- (8.) The comedy drama.
- (9.) The musical drama.
- (10.) The farce comedy, or farcical comedy.
- (11.) The farce.
- (12.) The burlesque.
- (13.) The burletta.
- (14.) The comédietta.

5. **Tragedy.** — The general character of tragedy, as that species of drama which presents the serious aspect of life, has already been suggested. As it is the business of the drama in general to portray the clash of individual interests,² it is the peculiar function

¹ No mention is made of the old English miracle and mystery plays, as they are no longer seen upon the stage either in the original form or in imitations. (For full particulars regarding them, see Ward's or Collier's *History of the Drama*). The same remark will not apply to the Spanish *Comedias de capa y de espada*, the Italian *Commedie dell' arte*, and many other examples from the European stage, but their connection with the English drama of to-day is too remote to entitle them to consideration here.

² See Chapter xv. 1.

of tragedy to represent this conflict as terminating fatally, that is, as resulting generally in the death of one or more of the contending characters; or at any rate, as involving a struggle of a stern and momentous character, from which escape is possible only through the intervention of extraordinary agencies. Hence tragedy calls for characters of unwonted strength of will and depth of seriousness, events of great significance, and an elevated style of diction, generally verse.

6. Comedy. — Comedy is the converse of tragedy. In it the conflict is always reconciled at the end and all disasters averted. The conflict itself, however serious it may seem during the progress of the play, turns out at the end to have been a case of much ado about nothing. The characters are either not serious in their aims, or if they are, the objects for which they are striving are shown to be worthless. In comedy some one is always represented as pursuing a bubble. At the close, the bubble bursts, and with good-natured submission the deluded pursuer acknowledges his folly. It follows that while in tragedy the characters are mostly taken from the higher walks of life, in comedy the average man is the central figure. The style is familiar and colloquial, and generally prose.

7. Theme, Characters, Plot, and Style. — From the preceding paragraphs it appears that the principal lines of distinction between

tragedy and comedy are to be sought for in the theme, the characters, the plot, and the style.

8. The Theme. — By the theme of a play is meant the problem, social, moral, political, religious, psychological, or whatever it may be, which the play presents for the consideration of the spectator. It is generally agreed that the drama should not be didactic, that is, should not directly teach anything, but this by no means enjoins the dramatist from bringing before us questions of momentous human interest and so treating them that the rightful solution is suggested if not demonstrated.

It should not be inferred from what has been said that the playwright must select a theme at the outset, and deliberately build his play upon it. He may be conscious of his theme, or he may work unconsciously and find with astonishment, when his work is over, that a theme has grown up under his hand unbidden. A thoughtful man, with well-defined views of the problems of human existence, can hardly present any picture of life or society without giving it somewhere the impress of his own thought, and making it somehow the vehicle of his own ideals.¹

¹ This line of thought cannot be pursued further here. It is perhaps needless to say that it involves some of the most hotly contested questions in dramatic criticism, more particularly the morality of the drama, and the

The theme in comedy is naturally of less importance than in tragedy, and in the lighter forms may not appear at all. Still even here a master-hand will manage to suggest in a striking manner current social or political problems.

On the characters in general, and on the plot, see §§ 4, 5, 6. The style is properly a matter of rhetoric, and is brought in here only as a convenient element for purposes of classification.

9. Kinds of Tragedy. — The principal varieties of tragedy are : —

- (1.) The ancient classic tragedy.
- (2.) The modern classic tragedy.
- (3.) The romantic tragedy.
- (4.) The mediated tragedy.

10. Meaning of the Word "Classic." — The word *classic*, as applied to the drama, is used in several different senses, which it will be well to distinguish at the outset. It means : —

(1.) Belonging to the Greek or Latin literatures at the time of their ascendancy.

(2.) Written under the influence of formal rules of criticism. In this sense the word is almost wholly confined to the French drama produced while the laws of the three unities¹ objectivity of the dramatist. Upon the latter point an interesting essay may be found (presenting the obverse of the argument) in the introduction to Alfred Austin's *Prince Lucifer*.

¹ See Chapter xv. 11.

were considered of force, but it has been applied to the period of French influence in Germany, England, and Italy. The classic drama *par excellence* belongs to the seventeenth century. Its influence lingered until the opening of this century, when the Romanticists, chiefly with the aid of Victor Hugo and Dumas *père*, broke over the classic rules and ushered in a new order of drama.

(3.) The middle (or Greek) stage in the development of art according to Hegel. The whole series is symbolic — classic — romantic. This is a highly technical use of the term, and plays no part in the present discussion. It is mentioned here simply because it is sometimes confused with the foregoing.

(4.) The best of its kind in any literature. Thus we say of any fine piece of literature which is certain to live, that it "has become one of the classics of the language."

11. Meaning of the Word "Romantic."

The following meanings are in use for the word *romantic*: —

(1.) Belonging to the literary movement directed against the French rules of criticism.

(2.) The third (or Christian) stage in the Hegelian system, as explained above.

(3.) Characterized by great freedom of imagination and treatment, as, *e. g.*, the Shakespearean drama.

12. **Ancient Classic Tragedy.** — This refers almost exclusively to the Greek tragedy,

and need not be dwelt upon. The Greek tragedy was imitated by the Romans and the Italians, and finds occasional imitators at the present day. The most notable instance of the latter is perhaps Swinburne, in his *Atalanta in Calydon*.

13. Theme, Characters, Plot, and Style.

(1.) *Theme*. The common theme of all Greek tragedies is the supremacy of fate over all things, both human and divine.

(2.) *Characters*. The principal characters are heroes, royal personages, and gods.

(3.) *Plot*. The story was uniformly taken from legend or mythology.¹ The close was generally a death (which never took place on the stage), but this catastrophe was sometimes averted, and the ending made a happy one. The unities, as they were afterwards called, were unknown to the Greek dramatists as rules of criticism, and were observed, when observed at all, purely by accident.

(4.) *Style*. Verse.

14. Modern Classic Tragedy. — This has been already sufficiently explained in § 10 (2), above. Unless otherwise specified, it is commonly understood to refer to the tragedies of Corneille and Racine.

15. Theme, Characters, Plot, and Style.

¹ A single instance of a tragedy in which original plot and characters were introduced, namely, Agathon's *Flower*, is mentioned by Aristotle. Unfortunately this play has not come down to us.

(1.) *Theme.* The chief defect of the classic tragedy is that (being an imitation of the Greek) it has no living theme of its own.

(2.) *Characters.* Same as above. The characters are mostly conventional types.

(3.) *Plot.* The stories are mostly taken from Greek and Latin literature. The unities are scrupulously observed, and the close must be a death. No comedy element is admitted.

(4.) *Style.* Heroic verse. Diction more or less declamatory and artificial.

Classic tragedy has never thrived on the English stage. Among the few examples worth mentioning are Addison's *Cato*, Johnson's *Irene*, and Byron's *Sardanapalus*.

16. Romantic Tragedy. — The term *romantic* is applied in a general way to any modern drama written without regard to the French rules of criticism, and characterized by the free play of passion and imagination.

17. Theme, Characters, Plot, and Style.

(1.) *Theme.* Almost any human passion may be used as a theme in romantic tragedy. Love always plays a prominent and generally a leading part in the tragic conflict.

(2.) *Characters.* The characters may be taken from any rank or station. Great stress is laid upon character-drawing.

(3.) *Plot.* Incidents are selected which will best bring out peculiarities of character. The conclusion is uniformly a death. Comic

incidents are freely interspersed. The unities are disregarded at will.

(4.) *Style.* Verse in the serious parts; verse or prose in the comedy passages. Great use is made of humor and pathos, by the combination of which subtle effects are attained unknown to the classic tragedy.

From the English point of view, such plays as *Frou-Frou* and *Camille* are romantic tragedies. As will appear later on, however, the French have other terms by which to designate plays of this class.

18. Mediated Tragedy. — There is a common type of drama which seems not to belong to either tragedy or comedy, or rather to belong to both at once. The play as a whole is of a serious character, and seems tending to a tragic catastrophe, but at the conclusion the disaster is averted and all ends happily. This class of plays is known in Germany as *Versöhnungs-drama* (reconciliation-drama). No corresponding term exists in English. Perhaps none that might be suggested would be likely to meet with universal acceptance, but the expression *mediated tragedy* seems as little objectionable as any, and will be used in this book wherever this class of plays is referred to as a class.

This is a convenient classification from a theoretical standpoint, because the nature of the conclusion has an intimate connection with the rest of the drama; but as a practical

designation to indicate the style of play intended, it is of no great importance. Specimens of mediated tragedy may be found in both the ancient classic and the modern romantic drama; consequently no generally applicable remarks can be made regarding themes, etc. As the mediated tragedy is the connecting link between tragedy and comedy, its subdivisions may properly form the subject-matter of a separate chapter.

CHAPTER VIII.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF PLAYS (*continued*).

Mediated Tragedy.

1. **Subdivisions.** — The general character of mediated tragedy was pointed out in the preceding chapter. The most important are: —

- (1.) The *drame*, or *Schauspiel*.
- (2.) The *pièce*.
- (3.) The emotional drama.
- (4.) The melodrama.

Of these the second and third are properly divisions of the first.

2. **The Drame.** — No English equivalent for this term is in use. The German *Schauspiel*, mostly used in a loose way to mean any sort of drama whatever, is often restricted to this particular species.

The general characteristic of the *drame* is the predominance of the emotional element. The following varieties may be distinguished:

- (1.) The romantic *drame*.
- (2.) The social *drame*.

3. **The Romantic Drame.** — The best examples of the romantic *drame* to be found on the American stage are what are commonly

known as "frontier dramas." Familiar instances are *Davy Crockett*, *Ranch 10*, and *The Danites*. It is distinguished by prominent emotional elements and a tendency to sentimentality, combined with rapid movement of incident.

4. Theme, Characters, Plot, and Style.

(1.) *Theme*. Generally of little importance. The value of personal strength, courage, and manliness is most frequently touched upon.

(2.) *Characters*. The characters are of a bold, free, and dashing type, and are taken, if from the past, from an age of personal bravery and gallantry, or, if from the present, either from some nationality in which such qualities prevail, or from a stage of society where the presence of law and order has not yet been recognized.

(3.) *Plot*. The romantic *drame* calls for striking incidents, strong situations,¹ and daring escapades. Rapidity of movement through a succession of quickly-culminating climaxes² is the most striking characteristic of the plot. The grand climax³ is not infrequently made a spectacular effect.

(4.) *Style*. Almost uniformly prose, of an impassioned and sometimes inflated order. Broad effects are aimed at in both humor and pathos, and rapid transitions are made from

¹ See Chapter x. 7.

² See Chapters xvi. 6 and xviii. 9.

³ See Chapter xix.

one to the other. "Sentiments" are frequently inserted in the lines.

A sentiment is a striking thought intended to appeal to the sensibilities of the audience (as the sense of justice, fair play, honor, patriotism, etc.), and carefully worded in language more or less poetical. "Rags are royal raiment when worn for virtue's sake," is a well-known sentiment from Bartley Campbell's *White Slave*. In this country a good sentiment rarely fails to win a round of applause, but in the French theatres (excepting those of a "popular" character) such bits of declamation frequently call out hisses.

The sentiment differs from the "gag" in that it is meant to be taken seriously, and is used but once in the play; whereas the gag has a comic effect, which grows with each repetition.

5. The Social Drame. — This is preëminently the drama of to-day, the outgrowth of the nineteenth century civilization of which it is a picture. It may be considered under two distinct classes: —

(1.) The *pièce*.

(2.) The emotional drama.

6. The *Pièce*. — There is unfortunately no English term corresponding to this French title, although the English "piece," often applied to plays in general, might well enough be appropriated for the purpose. The *pièce* is distinguished by the great prominence of the

comic (of an elevated character), which is used to relieve the intense emotional features of the play.

7. Theme, Characters, Plot, and Style.

(1.) *Theme.* The theme of the *pièce* should be some topic of the day, social or political. It must be a topic capable of being viewed in a light both serious and humorous. Any social movement in which the people are seriously interested, but which has developed abuses that may be exposed or laughed at, is a good theme for the *pièce*. Love is the standing theme of all plays of this class.

(2.) *Characters.* The characters are those of the society of the day.

(3.) *Plot.* The serious incidents are of a "quiet" order, but powerful. The comic incidents are numerous, and at times give the play almost the effect of the better class of light comedy.

(4.) *Style.* The style is as nearly as possible an imitation of the language of every-day life.

8. The Emotional Drama. — This differs from the *pièce* chiefly in the greater prominence accorded to the emotional element. It is somewhat further removed also from the interests of every-day life. It is less realistic and more sentimental.

9. Theme, Characters, Plot, and Style.

(1.) *Theme.* The theme may be the same as that of the *pièce*, but is taken more seriously, although less stress is laid upon it.

(2.) *Characters.* The characters are taken from modern life, but their virtues and vices are somewhat exaggerated. The villain¹ and the "heavy"² characters, in general, play a more prominent part than in the *pièce*.

(3.) *Plot.* The emotional drama calls for powerful situations displaying intense passion and emotion. The transition from pathos to humor is not so rapid, and need not be so artistically brought about as in the *pièce*.

(4.) *Style.* The style is less natural than that of the *pièce*, especially in the powerful situations, where the language is often highly poetical.

Both *pièce* and emotional drama are frequently spoken of as "society plays."

Although both these plays properly belong to mediated tragedy, the conclusion is sometimes the death of the principal character. The circumstances of the death are so managed, however, that its effect is emotional or pathetic rather than tragic.

10. *Melodrama.* — The original form of melodrama was that of a semi-heroic drama, the scenes of which were freely interspersed with songs. The musical element has now ceased to be a characteristic feature, and the name has been appropriated for an exaggerated style of emotional drama.

11. *Theme, Characters, Plot, and Style.*

(1.) *Theme.* The theme borders nearly on

¹ See Chapter xiii. 16.

² See Chapter xiii. 9.

that of the romantic *drame*, but it is treated in a strained and unbalanced fashion that robs it of its proper impressiveness for those who are not carried away by their emotions.

(2.) *Characters.* The characters are taken from all ranks of life. The villain is here indispensable, and generally takes the form of a group of thoroughly vicious characters, who, after working great mischief, end by circumventing and destroying one another.

(3.) *Plot.* The plots of melodrama are usually of a dark and gloomy character, full of startling incidents, bordering closely on the improbable. Intrigue and crime furnish the necessary complications.

(4.) *Style.* By a sort of dramatic license, the writer of melodrama is allowed to indulge in "gush" and "rant" to an almost unlimited extent. Indeed, in most cases, this is the only kind of language which harmonizes with the extravagant characters and situations. In some of the older melodramas the style is bombastic and unnatural to such a degree that to the reader of the present day it sounds like burlesque. Many of the more recent melodramas, on the other hand, show an encouraging moderation both in plot and diction.

12. Spectacular Drama.—This is the title given to almost any kind of dramatic performance which relies for its effects largely upon gorgeous scenery, furnishings, parades,

transformation scenes, etc. Melodramas are often selected for this purpose, but even comedies of a burlesque character are susceptible of such treatment. The French "féeries" and the English "Christmas pantomimes" are species of spectacular dramas; in fact, all performances not operas, requiring an extensive *corps de ballet* and gorgeous and fantastic costumes, properly fall under the head of spectacular.

12. The Musical Drama. — The libretto of the opera is a peculiar kind of drama entirely in verse and set to music, or partly in verse set to music and partly in prose to be spoken. Barring the verse, it does not differ much from any other drama, save that the plot is sometimes simpler and the action slower than would in other cases be allowable. The basis for *grand opera* is usually the romantic drame; for *comic opera*, light comedy or burlesque.

CHAPTER IX.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF PLAYS (*continued*).

Comedy.

1. **Kinds of Comedy.** — The general character of comedy has been indicated in a foregoing chapter.¹ Its kinds are by no means so numerous as those of tragedy, nor is it so difficult to distinguish between them. What has been said regarding classical and romantic tragedy will apply to classical and romantic comedy, — keeping in mind of course the fundamental difference between comedy and tragedy. It will not be necessary, therefore, to go into so full details as in the preceding chapters. The following are the principal types of comedy : —

- (1.) Ancient classic comedy.
- (2.) Modern classic comedy.
- (3.) Romantic comedy.
- (4.) The comedy of manners.
- (5.) The comedy drama.
- (6.) The farce comedy or farcical comedy.
- (7.) The farce.
- (8.) The burlesque.
- (9.) The burletta.
- (10.) The comedieta.

¹ See Chapter vii. 6.

2. Ancient Classic Comedy. — In ancient Greek comedy it is customary to distinguish three different classes or stages :

(1.) The *old comedy*, characterized by bitter personal and political satire. Aristophanes is the principal representative.

(2.) The *middle comedy*, dealing with society rather than politics, and critical rather than satirical. Represented by fragments of the plays of Philippus, Araros, Antiphanes, and Alexis.

(3.) The *new comedy*, of a thoroughly social character, full of conventional episodes and stock characters. The great representative of this class is Menander. The new comedy furnished models for the Latin plays of Plautus and Terence, which last were in turn models for early English playwrights. Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, for example, is a direct imitation of the *Menæchmi* of Plautus.

3. Modern Classic and Romantic Comedy. — The observance or non-observance of the three unities is the only ground for this division. When the romantic movement swept away the ancient critical barriers, comedy naturally shared in the liberties accorded to tragedy.

4. Comedy of Manners. — In the comedy of manners especial attention is paid to character-drawing, and each character is made the representative of a certain trait or passion.

In this way conventional or stock characters are developed, such as the dissipated son, the rich and miserly uncle, the cruel father, the intriguing servant, and so on, which are used over and over again. Comedies of manners are of a quiet and domestic character and deal with the follies of society. The term has about gone out of use, except when referring to the comedy of the last century.

5. The Comedy Drama. — The most dignified form of comedy is the comedy drama or comic drama. It may, in fact, so nearly approach the *pièce* as hardly to be distinguished from it. It does not admit, however (as the *pièce* does) incidents of a really tragic character. Whatever in the comedy drama seems to be serious must in the end turn out to have been a mistake. There can be no death, no misfortune which cannot be made right at the conclusion. The humor must be of a refined order, and arise from manifestation of character rather than from arrangement of situation and incident.¹

6. The Farce Comedy. — The farce comedy is a transition stage from the comedy drama to the farce. Considerable attention is still paid to the characterization, but the

¹ For perfect models of refined comedy drama, the student cannot do better than turn to the plays of Emile Augier. Anything more perfect in construction and in delineation of character, or more delicate in humor, cannot be found in any language.

incidents and the lines furnish most of the entertainment.

7. The Farce. — In the farce almost the sole reliance is placed in the plot and the lines. Laughable incidents tread upon one another's heels, and the lines are filled with witticisms which have little fitness to the characters uttering them. The characters are arbitrarily exaggerated and overdrawn for the sake of comic effect. A farce which aims solely at exciting boisterous laughter from beginning to end is called a *screaming farce*. The farce is generally short.

8. The Burlesque. — The burlesque is a kind of dramatic parody. It may parody either some well-known play (or type of plays), or some familiar institution of society. Of the latter class two kinds are commonly distinguished : —

(1.) That in which personages of high rank or culture are represented as acting in a trivial way.

(2.) That in which insignificant characters are represented as performing acts pertaining to heroic personages.

9. The Burletta. — This term, which properly means a small joke, is sometimes applied to short farces built on very slight plots.

10. The Comedietta. — Any very short comedy may be termed a comedietta, but the term generally implies a more quiet movement and more care in character-sketching

than the farce. In this sense, a comedietta is a miniature comedy drama.

11. **Recapitulation and Illustrations.**—The following table brings together the contents of the foregoing chapters in their proper relations, with illustrations of the different kinds of plays mentioned.

I. TRAGEDY.

(1.) *a. Ancient classic* (with catastrophe). *Electra* of Sophocles.

b. Ancient classic (mediated). *Suppliants* of Æschylus.

(2.) *Modern classic.* Corneille's *Cinna*; Addison's *Cato*.

(3.) *Romantic.* Shakespeare's *Macbeth*; Schiller's *Maria Stuart*; Calderon's *El Magico prodigioso*; Manzoni's *Il Conte Carmagnola*; Victor Hugo's *Hernani*; Sardou's *Theodora*.

II. MEDIATED TRAGEDY.

(1.) *a. The romantic drame.* Miller's *The Danites*; Bulwer's *Richelieu*; Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*.

b. The social drama; including (2) and (3) below.

(2.) *The pièce.* Bronson Howard's *The Henrietta*; Dumas' *Denise*; Feuillet's *Parisian Romance*.

(3.) *The emotional drama.* Sardou's *Fédora*; Feuillet's *Roman d'un jeune homme*

pauvre; Bronson Howard's *Banker's Daughter*; Gillette's *Held by the Enemy*.

(4.) *The melodrama*. Wills's *The Silver King*; Dennery's *Two Orphans*; Bartley Campbell's *My Partner*.

(5.) *Spectacular drama*. Bartley Campbell's *White Slave*; Bronson Howard's *Shenandoah* (of a higher order); *Around the World in Eighty Days*; *Clio*; *Adonis*.

(6.) *Musical drama*.

The libretto of musical drama can cover all forms of tragedy and comedy, consequently it is hardly worth while to give illustrations.

III. COMEDY.

(1.) *Ancient classic*.

a. Greek, *Old comedy*. *The Birds* of Aristophanes.

b. Greek, *Middle comedy*. Philippus, Araros, Antiphanes, and Alexis (Fragments).

c. Greek, *New comedy*. Menander, Diphilus, Philemon (Fragments).

d. Latin. *Rudens* of Plautus, *Phormio* of Terence.

(2.) *Modern classic*. Molière's *Tartuffe*; Racine's *Les Plaideurs*.

(3.) *Comedy of manners*. Sheridan's *School for Scandal*; Goldoni's *Le Donne Curieuse*.

(4.) *Romantic comedy*.

a. *Comedy drama*. Bronson Howard's *Young Mrs. Winthrop*; Mackaye's *Hazel*

Kirke ; Burnett and Gillette's *Esmeralda* ; De Mille and Belasco's *The Wife*.

b. *Farce comedy*. Bronson Howard's *Saratoga* ; Gilbert's *Engaged* ; Daly's *A Night Off* ; Gillette's *The Professor*.

c. *Farce*.¹ Tom Taylor's *A Blighted Being* ; Hennequin's *Pink Dominos* ; Gilbert's *Tom Cobb* ; Morton's *Box and Cox* ; Hawtrey's *The Private Secretary*.

d. *Burlesque*. Durivage's *Lady of the Lions*.

e. *Burletta*. Boucicault's *Lover by Proxy*.

f. *Comedietta*. Augier's *Post Scriptum* ; Bronson Howard's *Old Love Letters* ; Howells's *Elevator*.

¹ Artistically-constructed farces are not common in this country. The name is often incorrectly applied to such unclassifiable jumbles of song and dance, horse-play and low comedy as *The Rag Baby*, *Tin Soldier*, *Skipped by the Light of the Moon*, *Photos*, *We, Us, and Co*, etc.

CHAPTER X.

THE PARTS OF A PLAY.

1. **Acts.** — Most plays are divided into from two to five main divisions, called acts.

2. **Divisions of the Acts.** — The acts are further divided into : —

- (1.) Scenes.
- (2.) Tableaux.
- (3.) Situations.

3. **Definition of an Act.** — An act is a division of a play marked at its close by the falling of the curtain and the suspension of the action.

4. **Entr'acte.** — The interval between the acts is termed *entr'acte*. No English equivalent for the word is in good usage.

5. **Scene.** — The shifting of scenery during the progress of an act brings about a change of scene, using the word in the English sense.¹

6. **Tableau.** — A tableau is a division of an act marked by a momentary descent of the curtain. It frequently implies some spectacular effect.

¹ On the French stage, a new scene is introduced by every important *entré*.

The word *tableau* is also used with reference to a *stage picture* or grouping of characters at the close of an act.

7. Situation. — This term has various meanings: —

(1.) It is sometimes used with reference to any striking incident in the play.

(2.) It is sometimes used as an equivalent for *climax*.¹

(3.) It frequently corresponds to the French word *scène*.²

The terms *scene* and *situation* are sometimes used as synonyms. Thus we may speak either of a "strong scene" or a "strong situation." The word *situation*, however, refers properly to the moment of greatest suspense; *scene*, to the whole progress of the incident.

8. Number of Acts. — No fixed rule can be given for the number of acts into which a play should be divided. The old division into five acts, a tradition handed down from the Roman stage, is no longer observed with any uniformity. The following table shows the prevailing tendency at the present time: —

(1.) Tragedies, five acts.

(2.) Romantic drames and melodramas, five acts.

(3.) Emotional dramas, *pièces*, and society dramas, four or five acts.

(4.) Comedy dramas, four acts.

¹ See Chapter xvi. 6.

² See footnote, in this chapter, under 5.

- (5.) Comedies of manners, five acts.
- (6.) Comedies of incidents, three or four acts.
- (7.) Farce comedies, three acts.
- (8.) Farces, one, two, or three acts.
- (9.) Spectacular plays, five acts, usually divided into tableaux.
- (10.) Libretto for grand opera, five acts, sometimes with tableaux.
- (11.) Libretto for *opéra comique*, three or four acts.
- (12.) Libretto for comic opera, three (sometimes two) acts.
- (13.) Burlesques, with or without music, one to five acts.
- (14.) "Curtain raisers," whether farces or bits of true comedy, invariably one act.

9. Length of Acts. — As a general rule, the acts should be of about equal length, but the canon of the Sanskrit drama, *i. e.*, that the play shall resemble the end of the cow's tail, the acts diminishing gradually to the close, is not without its advantage. As the entire time of actual performance should not much exceed two hours, the average length of act for different classes of plays will be about as follows : —

- (1.) *Length of five-act plays.* Twenty-five minutes to each act. A better distribution of time would be thirty-five minutes for the first act; fifteen for the fifth act; twenty-five each for the remaining acts. This gives a total of two hours and five minutes.

(2.) *Length of four-act plays.* Thirty minutes to each act. If the length is to be varied, let the first and third acts be the longest. In that case, act first should take not more than thirty-five minutes; act third not more than forty minutes, leaving for act second thirty minutes, and for act fourth twenty minutes. Total, two hours and five minutes.

(3.) *Length of three-act plays.* — If a three-act play is to be produced alone, that is, not preceded by a "curtain raiser," the second act should be the longest. The following proportions are generally observed: Act first, forty minutes. Act second, fifty minutes. Act third, thirty-five minutes.

If a three-act play is to be preceded by a "curtain-raiser," let the three acts be of 30 minutes each.

(4.) *Length of two-act plays.* Except in the case of musical compositions, two-act plays are not intended to furnish a full evening's entertainment. The acts should never exceed thirty minutes each.

(5.) *Length of one-act plays.* The length varies according to the purpose for which the play is intended. A "curtain-raiser" is usually from twenty-five to thirty-five minutes long. No one-act play should exceed forty minutes.

10. How to determine the Length of an Act. — Considerable experience is required to judge from the manuscript of a play how

long it will take to perform it. Much depends on the fullness of detail with which the business is indicated, as well as on the character of the business itself. In spectacular plays, where the descriptions of scenery, stage movements, etc., are of more importance than the lines themselves, and in low comedy farces containing a great deal of horse-play, no one but an expert in such matters can form an exact estimate of the time they will occupy. For the general run of modern plays, however, the following rule will answer most purposes:—

11. Rule for determining the Length of a Play.—If the production is to occupy 125 minutes, the actual number of words in the manuscript, including lines, names of characters before each speech, stage directions, and business of every description, should not exceed 20,000, all told, *i. e.*, the length of the manuscript should not exceed 160 words for each minute of actual performance. The number of words, therefore, for each act may be found by multiplying the number of minutes required in performance (as given in the foregoing tables) by 160.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ENTER.

1. Meaning of the Term. — The appearance of a character upon the stage during the progress of an act constitutes an *enter*.

2. Discovered at Rise. — As before explained, a character already upon the stage at the opening of the act is not said to enter, but to be discovered at rise.

3. The Re-enter. — The term re-enter is used instead of enter when a character reappears on the stage shortly after having left it.

It is evident that enter will, in the manuscript, answer every purpose of re-enter, but the latter expression is useful for the reader both to remind him that the character has recently appeared on the stage, and to show the relative importance of the second appearance. The term *return* is sometimes used for re-enter.

4. When the Term Re-enter should be used. — The term re-enter should be used : —

(1.) When a character, having left the stage, reappears before any new or striking feature of the plot occurs.

(2.) When little importance is to be attached to the reappearance.

(3.) A servant may enter at the beginning of an act and re-enter several times during its progress.

5. Passing at Rear. — A series of enters and re-enters on the part of dumb characters, representing the "company" [guests, visitors, etc.], is best indicated by the phrase "*seen passing at rear*," or "*seen coming on and going off at rear*."

When these movements are supposed to take place at frequent intervals during the scene or act, much repetition may be avoided by noting the fact at the beginning. For example, "Sentinel seen passing at rear during the scene;" "Promenaders seen *coming on and going off at rear at intervals* (the act)." (5)

Appearance. — A character who is "exposed" during the play, but does not come immediately upon the stage, is said to *appear*. Under this class fall all such movements as sticking the head in through a window, opening and suddenly closing the door of a closet or other place of concealment, peeping from behind a tree, etc. The term is frequently used where a character is seen about to enter but pauses momentarily for an effective situation before entering.

Thus, —

Hester. Maxwell is dead, and dead men, thank heaven! tell no tales.

Maxwell. [*Appears on threshold.*] Hester!

Hester. [*Screams.*] My husband!

Enter Maxwell.

7. Management of the Enter. — The proper use and management of the enters, being to a considerable extent governed by convention and stage traditions, are among the most difficult things which the beginner has to learn. The following rules will be found to cover the most important cases, though much must be left to observation and experience.

- (1.) Logical enter.
- (2.) Conventional use of entrances.
- (3.) Lines with enter.
- (4.) Use of the tormentors.
- (5.) Preparing for enter.
- (6.) Stereotyped forms.
- (7.) Enters prepared for by the plot.
- (8.) Leading up to enter of star.
- (9.) Names mentioned.
- (10.) Double enter.
- (11.) Unnoticed enter.

8. Logical Enter. — The enter should be logical. This means that the playwright should not use the stage entrances arbitrarily, but should keep in mind the part of the house, if an interior, or of the neighborhood, if an exterior, to which each entrance leads.

An entrance used for characters coming

from the street should not, in general, be used for those entering from a bedroom or dining-room.

9. Conventional use of Entrances. —

Let the student note the following :—

(1.) Characters coming into an interior from the street usually enter from the rear. It stands to reason, therefore, that a servant, answering the door-bell, will pass out one of the rear entrances, generally C. D., and return ushering in the visitor at the same entrance.

(2.) The doors at right and left may be supposed to lead to, or into, boudoirs, dining-rooms, drawing-rooms, library, etc., at the pleasure of the writer, though probability is always to be consulted. Bedrooms, for example, are usually on the opposite side from dining-rooms.

(3.) Servants coming from the servants' quarter should be brought in R. D. or L. D.

10. Lines with Enter. — The chief action of a play takes place in the centre, well down stage, *i. e.*, near the footlights. If, therefore, enters are made from the rear, the entering character will be at some distance from the person on the stage, and an awkward period of silence may elapse while the former is making his way down to the latter. This difficulty may be avoided by bringing the character in at a right or left entrance, near the front, provided this can be logically done ; or

by furnishing the entering character with a speech which will carry him over the interval. The following scene, for example, is absolutely unactable: —

Marion. [*Seated at R. front.*] Whose voice do I hear?
[*Enter Cameron L. D. rear.*] Robert! [*Falls into his arms.*]

If possible, Cameron should be brought in R. 2 E. If not, the scene may be rearranged in some such fashion as this: —

Marion. [*Seated R. front.*] Whose voice do I hear?
[*Rises and starts towards rear. Enter Cameron L. D. rear.*]
Robert!

Cameron. [*Coming down.*] Marion! Come to my arms! All is forgiven. [*She falls into his arms.*]

11. Use of the Tormentors. — The use of the tormentors for entrances should be avoided, especially in interiors. If the stage represents a room, the further side of the tormentor stands for the front wall. Consequently, in theory, the tormentor leads nowhere. As a matter of fact, however, the rule is violated about as often as it is observed.

12. Preparing for Enter. — Since an enter is an essential incident in the plot, all enters should be carefully *prepared for* or *led up to*. The reason for this important rule will be apparent when we come to study the construction of the plot. It will be sufficient at this point to indicate its practical application.

An enter is prepared for or led up to, when the lines, business, or incidents immediately preceding are of such a character as to make the entrance natural and inevitable.

The audience may or may not be led to anticipate the enter. In the former case it is customary to announce the approach of the character in so many words, as, "By my head, here comes the Capulets." If the enter is unexpected, none the less must it appear to the audience, as soon as it occurs, to be natural and to have been inevitable.

13. Stereotyped Forms. — An unmistakable ear-mark of the young or slipshod playwright is the use of the hackneyed expression, "But I hear some one coming," to introduce an enter. The phrase itself, however, aside from the fact that it is hackneyed, is not especially objectionable. What is objectionable is its use as a mere device to get upon the stage a character that has not been properly prepared for by the incidents of the plot. A little ingenuity will enable the dramatist to dispense with such stereotyped forms.

14. Enters prepared for by the Plot. — The best enters are those which grow naturally and easily out of the plot and are thus led up to by the incidents which precede them without any appearance of artifice. The following will serve as an illustration : —

Miss Lester. [*At mirror.*] I know Walter will like this dress; blue was his favorite color. [*A ring at the*

door-bell.] There he is now! [*Surveys herself in the mirror.*]

Enter Tom, Dick, or Harry.

Walter's entrance later is now well prepared for.

15. **Leading up to Enter of Star.** — The enter of the most important character of the play, especially if the enter is to be followed by a strong situation, should be prepared for by a series of incidents and references calculated to bring the audience to a climax of suspense.

Thus the "Enter Hamlet" which precedes the interview with the queen, in the fourth scene, is prepared for throughout the two preceding scenes, as follows: —

(1.) Guildenstern tells Hamlet that the queen has sent for him.

(2.) Polonius enters and makes the same announcement.

(3.) Hamlet replies that he will go, and in a soliloquy lets it be understood that the scene will be a strong one.

(4.) In the next scene Polonius tells the king that Hamlet is on his way to the closet.

(5.) Hamlet then appears for a moment but goes out with the words "My mother stays."

(6.) Finally, Polonius is shown informing the queen that Hamlet "will come straight," closing with "I hear him coming."

All this leads up to an entrance which not a few modern playwrights would consider suffi-

ciently heralded by the single speech, "but I hear Hamlet coming."

16. Names mentioned. — In preparing for an enter the name of the person expected should be explicitly mentioned, unless the concealment of it is purposely designed as a feature of the plot.

17. Double Enter. — It is a safe rule never to bring two important characters on the stage at the same moment. The attention of the audience is divided, and, worse than all else, the actors themselves have no means of knowing for whom the applause, if there be any, is intended.

Strong comic effects, however, may often be produced in this way, and sometimes, as where two enemies are brought face to face from opposite sides of the stage, powerful tragic situations. Where no such startling effects are aimed at, face-to-face encounters should be avoided.

18. Unnoticed Enter. — Avoid, if possible, the hackneyed device of bringing a character upon the stage to overhear a conversation; or if no other resource is at hand, at any rate avoid taking the character off again without allowing him to be discovered by the others upon the stage. Considerable latitude in this regard must, of course, be permitted in the case of light comedy, burlesque, or melodrama.

CHAPTER XII.

THE EXIT.

1. Meaning of the Term. — Any character who leaves the stage during the progress of an act, is said to "*exit*." If two or more characters leave the stage at the same time, the plural form, "*exeunt*," is used.

2. Relation of the Exit to the Lines. — Great care must be taken in managing the exit. Four different varieties may be distinguished : —

- (1.) The exit to create a situation.
- (2.) The exit without lines.
- (3.) The exit with an apart.
- (4.) The exit with a re-enter.

3. The Exit to create a Situation. — As every important enter usually brings about a situation, so every important exit should create some degree of suspense. The object of the dramatist should be not merely to get the character off the stage, but to make the audience feel that he is going off for a purpose, and so to make them watch for his return. Again, the exit of a character may give those who remain an opportunity to do what they were restrained from doing by his presence,

or may cause them to throw off some disguise maintained for his benefit. Exits of this kind require skillful management, and all that has been said under this head, of the enter, will necessarily apply to the exit.

4. Exit without Lines. — The exit without lines is of three kinds: —

(1.) The exit of a servant, who leaves the stage after an unimportant enter, such as bringing a card, ushering in a guest, answering a bell to receive an order, etc.

(2.) The exit of some of the guests, when characters representing the "company" are moving on and off the stage.

(3.) The exit unnoticed by the others on the stage and intended to create surprise when the absence of the character is discovered by the further movement of the plot.

5. Exit with an Apart. — The exit with an *apart*¹ is intended to prepare for an enter, and hence, usually, for a situation. In such cases the apart must consist of some information of considerable importance. The apart may be a "*gag*,"² and thus be used with each exit of a character.

6. Exit with Re-enter. — An exit with an immediate re-enter is especially effective in light comedies. It may come under the head of *reappearance*. In combination with what has been called above the "exit to create a situation" (3), the reappearance may be

¹ See Chapter xxii. 5.

² See Chapter viii. 4.

made to produce very comical situations, those present on the stage having to change attitude, facial expression, manners, etc., on realizing that the exit was only momentary. The reappearance in such cases consists in sticking in the head at the door, etc.

What has been said in the preceding chapter of the "Logical enter," "Conventional use of entrances," "The tormentors," "Preparing for enter," "Enter prepared for by the plot," is also true of the exit.

CHAPTER XIII.

DIFFERENT RÔLES IN PLAYS. — MALE RÔLES.

1. **Types of Characters.** — Although the conditions of dramatic production admit the possibility of an infinite variety of characters, the history of the stage in different countries shows that all may be referred to a few general types marked by broad characteristics of difference. These types occur over and over in the plays forming the *repertories*¹ of modern theatrical companies.

2. **Classification of Actors.** — Actors are classified according as they customarily assume the part of one type or another. The members of a company are selected with reference to them. Most important of all, from the present point of view, plays are now usually written and arranged so as to require a certain number and proportion of male and female actors of the various classes.

3. **Rôles.** — The types referred to above are commonly termed *rôles*, although this word, it should be noted, is also used to signify the part of any particular character in a

¹ The French word *répertoire* is also in common use.

particular play, as the rôle of Macbeth, Juliet, and so on.

4. Male Rôles. — The principal male rôles are as follows : —

- (1.) The Star.
- (2.) The Leading Man.
- (3.) The Heavy.
- (4.) The First Old Man.
- (5.) The Second Old Man.
- (6.) The Comedian.
- (7.) The Light Comedian.
- (8.) The Low Comedian.
- (9.) The Eccentric Comedian.
- (10.) The Villain.
- (11.) The Juvenile.
- (12.) The Walking Gentleman.
- (13.) The Utility Man.
- (14.) The Super or "Supe" (supernumerary).

5. The Star. — An actor (presumably of unusual attainments) who habitually plays the leading rôle is called a *star*. Plays in which the leading rôle is strongly marked go by the name of *star plays*, and the important rôles are called *star rôles*, or *star parts*. In a company where there is a star, the remainder of the company is known as the *support*.

6. Star Plays. — When star plays are written to order, the part of the star is usually emphasized at the expense of the rest of the characters. The star is given the lion's share of the strong situations, kept upon the

stage during the greater portion of each act, and made the obvious centre of interest and attraction during the entire performance. The lines and incidents of the plot are so arranged as to give him every opportunity for displaying his peculiar gifts. Everything which might detract from his importance is carefully excluded, and not unfrequently the other rôles in the play are reduced to mere nonentities in order that the star may shine the more brilliantly by force of contrast. Examples of star plays in which all the characters are given strongly marked individuality are rare outside of the Shakespearean repertory.

7. Double Stars. — A few plays are so arranged as to afford equal opportunities to two different actors. Such are the parts of Othello and Iago in *Othello*, of Brutus and Cassius in *Julius Caesar*, etc. The last-named play may almost be said to have three star rôles, since the part of Antony falls but little below the other two in point of interest.

8. The Leading Man. — In star plays the leading man plays the male rôle next in importance to that of the star. If the star is a lady, the leading man, in about ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, plays the part of her lover. In stock companies, the leading man fills the place of the star, whenever the play calls for one.

9. The Heavy. — An actor who habitually

plays serious parts, devoid of comedy elements, and calling for considerable manifestation of strong feeling, is called a heavy. The parts of the King and of the Ghost in *Hamlet* would be taken by heavies. Actors of this type who are qualified to assume important rôles are spoken of as *leading heavies*.

10. First Old Man.—The *old men* are distinguished from the heavies by their gray hair. The most important old man character, in a play which calls for more than one, is called the *first old man*. The part is usually dignified, exhibiting the nobler and more pathetic qualities of old age, such as tenderness of feeling, magnanimity, etc. Less frequently the first old man portrays the vices of old age.

11. Second Old Man.—If the play calls for two characters representing old men, the less prominent of the two is called the *second old man*. The second old man is not infrequently a comic character.

12. The Comedian.—An actor who is qualified to assume important comedy rôles is called a *comedian*. In comedies the star is a comedian.

13. The Light Comedian.—The comedian's business is to interpret comic characters. The *light comedian* makes it his aim to cause amusement partly by representation of character, but mostly by tricks of manner, gesture, and voice, and by witty lines.

14. **The Low Comedian.** — The business of the *low comedian* is to excite laughter. To this end he resorts to any effective device, no matter how undignified, irrelevant or inconsistent. There is usually but little pretense of character-drawing. In the lower class of theatres the part of the low comedian consists largely of horse-play — rude rough-and-tumble, tripping over chairs, falling into the water, etc. In the better theatres and in first-class plays, low-comedy rôles are sometimes made to have considerable dramatic value by the selection of characters representative of the lower classes of life.

15. **The Eccentric Comedian.** — A comedian who gives himself up to the portrayal of odd and whimsical freaks of character is called an *eccentric comedian*.

16. **The Villain.** — The character in a play who represents the evil tendencies of human nature, and hence seeks to frustrate the purposes of the nobler characters, is called the *villain*. The villain may be either a heavy or a comedian. In the older plays, he was almost invariably the former, and when uncommonly wicked and blood-thirsty was known as the *heavy villain*. At the present day it is not unusual to give the villain a touch of comedy, generally of a satirical kind. There has been some discussion of late over the question whether the villain may not be dispensed with altogether, but

until human nature undergoes a radical change it is not likely that this interesting character will be eliminated either from real life or from the drama.

17. The Juvenile. — An actor who habitually undertakes youthful rôles is called a *juvenile*. The supposed age of the character represented may range anywhere from fifteen to thirty years.

18. The Walking Gentleman. — A rôle requiring simply presence on the stage and few if any lines to speak, and yet one which is an essential part of the play, is commonly taken by the *walking gentleman*. Where a part calls for a speech, it is called a "speaking part."

19. The Utility Man. — An actor who can make himself generally useful on and off the stage and who, though unqualified to assume important rôles, is able to fill a minor vacancy in case of emergency, is called a *utility man*.

20. The Super. — Non-professional persons hired, for a single performance or a series of performances, to represent unimportant parts, such as waiters, soldiers, a mob, etc., are called *supernumeraries*, *supers* or *supes*. The super who leads in the enter or exit of a company of supers is called *captain of the supers*.

21. Character Actor. — An actor who cultivates the power of representing with equal

facility widely different characters is called a *character actor*. If the characters represented embrace those commonly called for in the modern repertories, he is called an *all-around character actor*.

22. Doubling up. — As but few of the characters of a play are upon the stage at the same moment, except in important climaxes, it is sometimes possible so to arrange the action that one actor may play two parts. This is known as *doubling up*. In *Hamlet*, for instance, the same personage might represent both the King and the Ghost, since the two are never upon the stage together. In arranging such parts, care should be taken to see that the actor who *doubles up* has sufficient time, after leaving the stage, to dress for the second character.

CHAPTER XIV.

DIFFERENT RÔLES IN PLAYS. — FEMALE RÔLES.

1. Classification of Female Rôles. —

The principal female rôles are : —

- (1.) The Star.
- (2.) The Leading Lady.
- (3.) The Emotional Actress.
- (4.) The First Old Woman.
- (5.) The Second Old Woman.
- (6.) The Comedienne.
- (7.) The Soubrette.
- (8.) The Ingénue.
- (9.) The Adventuress.
- (10.) The Juvenile.
- (11.) The Walking Lady.
- (12.) The Utility Woman.

2. Correspondence to Male Rôles. —

All that has been said with regard to male rôles applies equally well to the corresponding female rôles. The female rôles that have no correspondence whatever with male rôles are : —

- (1.) The Soubrette.
- (2.) The Ingénue.

The *adventuress* answers in the main to the

male villain, and the *emotional actress* to the male heavy.

3. The Soubrette. — The term *soubrette*, originally applied to the intriguing chambermaid of the old French comedy, is now used of any pert, frivolous, sprightly, and youthful female character. The favorite part for the soubrette is still that of the chambermaid, but star soubrette parts are not uncommon. At least one prominent actress — Lotta — has made fame and fortune in almost purely soubrette rôles.

4. The Ingénue. — The characteristics of the *ingénue* are youth, simplicity, and artless innocence, generally mingled, in modern plays, with a generous proportion of sentiment. The *ingénue* may have, and generally does have, opportunities for strong demonstration, thus bordering on the province of the emotional actress. Again, the *ingénue* may approach the soubrette in comedy lines; but the comic should be rather a humorous elaboration of simplicity than an obviously ingenious witticism.

5. Arrangement of Cast. — A stock company *cast*¹ comprises the following list of actors: —

- (1.) The Leading Man.
- (2.) The First Old Man.
- (3.) The Comedian.

¹ A "cast" is an acting company to whom parts are assigned; hence the expression, *casting a play*.

- (4.) The Second Old Man.
- (5.) The Light Comedian.
- (6.) The Villain.
- (7.) The Juvenile (male).
- (8.) The Leading Lady.
- (9.) The First Old Woman.
- (10.) The Comedienne.
- (11.) The Soubrette.
- (12.) The Ingénue.
- (13.) The Juvenile (female).

6. Cast of Traveling Companies. — The cast of traveling companies is made up of the characters needed for the performance of some one or two plays, unless the company on the road is a stock company.

There are very few plays on the road that require more than ten characters.

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A PLAY.

1. Definition. — In the broadest sense, a play is a complete and unified story of human life acted out on the stage in a series of motivated incidents so arranged as to excite the greatest amount of interest and pleasure in the spectator by means of novelty, variety, contrast, suspense, surprise, climax, humor, and pathos.

This is not intended for an exact scientific definition; but as it covers the essential features of all plays produced at the present day, it is much better adapted for our purpose than any of the definitions which have come down to us from antiquity. A closer examination of it will suggest the following points, which will be taken up and discussed in the order given: —

- (1.) The story.
- (2.) What constitutes a story.
- (3.) Characters.
- (4.) Characters suited to the story.
- (5.) Characters distinguished.
- (6.) Self-consistency of characters.
- (7.) Characters as foils.
- (8.) Completeness.

- (9.) Unity.
- (10.) The three unities.
- (11.) Unity of action.
- (12.) Unity of time.
- (13.) Unity of place.
- (14.) The story must be one that can be acted.
- (15.) The story must be suited to stage conventions.
- (16.) Motived incidents.
- (17.) Interest and pleasure.¹
- (18.) Novelty.
- (19.) Variety and contrast.
- (20.) Suspense.
- (21.) Surprise.
- (22.) Climax.
- (23.) Humor and pathos.
- (24.) Where stories come from.
- (25.) Character of good stories.
- (26.) Adaptation.
- (27.) Adapting novels.
- (28.) Adapting foreign plays.

2. The Story. — The first and most essential feature of a play is the story. It may be very simple, or it may be very complex. It may be no more than: John wants to marry Susan, but cannot because Dick has told her that John is in love with Mary; John discovers Dick's villainy and marries Susan.²

¹ See Chapter XVI., in which this and the following sub-titles will be discussed.

² The plot of one of the most popular plays of the

Many successful plays have had no better formula than this.

On the other hand, the story may be a confused tangle of ingenious complications as hard to separate as a Chinese puzzle. In any case there must be a story of some sort, — somebody must steal, or kill, or deceive, or love, or wed, — or there can be no play. The first thing, then, that the playwright must provide himself with, is a good story, or, better, a collection of good stories.

3. What Constitutes a Story. — Every story that has any value for dramatic purposes may be reduced to the following formula : —

A (standing for one or more characters) is trying to achieve some purpose. A is opposed by B (representing one or more characters), who tries to prevent A from carrying out his design. After a series of incidents, in which first one and then the other seems to have the upper hand, A finally succeeds in frustrating the designs of B, and either accomplishes the end sought or is killed.

4. Characters. — As the story is one of human life, it treats of the actions of men and women, and in consequence has *characters*.

In the selection of his characters, the playwright has an almost unlimited range ; but four requirements must be observed : —

century, *Hazel Kirke*, may be stated in this way : She is married ; no, she is not ; yes, she is !

(1.) The characters must be suited to the story, — the story to the characters.

(2.) The characters must be clearly distinguished one from another.

(3.) The characters must be self-consistent.

(4.) The characters must be so selected and arranged that each one may serve as a foil to another.

5. Characters Suited to the Story. —

The incidents of the story must seem to grow out of the nature of the characters, and, on the other hand, the incidents must react on the characters to produce the result aimed at.

In the *Merchant of Venice*, the trial scene is the direct outcome of Shylock's avarice and race prejudice. Put generous Othello in Shylock's place and the trial scene would be an absurdity. Equally absurd, on the other hand, would it have been to represent the keen-witted Shylock as believing in Iago's veracity.

6. Characters Distinguished. — As, in real life, no two persons are exactly alike, so in a play each character must be marked off from every other, down to the least important. A skillful dramatist will manage to do this by a single touch. Thus the one line in which Shakespeare characterizes Robin Ostler, "never joy'd since the price of oats rose," distinguishes him from all other characters.

The distinguishing marks should be real elements of character, not mere tricks of dress, manner, or speech. A set form of

words put always into the mouth of the same character is called a *gag*.

7. Self-Consistency of Characters. —

Each personage must be made to say and do exactly what is appropriate to his character. A flagrant violation of this rule is found in Boucicault's *London Assurance* (as commonly performed), where that selfish old reprobate, Sir Harcourt, is given at the close a speech teeming with lofty sentiments and exalted morality.

As Aristotle points out, a character, to be consistent with itself, must often be drawn as inconsistent. An inconsistent woman, for example, would be self-consistent only if portrayed in all her characteristic inconsistency.

8. Characters as Foils. — As will be shown later, contrast is one of the instruments of dramatic effect. An avaricious character, like Shylock, stands out much more vividly when a generous nature, like Antonio's, stands over against it as a foil.

Plays composed entirely of vicious or entirely of virtuous characters would be insufferable. The characters should be so selected and arranged that in each scene the prominent characteristics of each may be made more prominent by contrast with the others of the same group.

9. Completeness. — By a complete story is meant one that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A story is complete when it is

told so that the listener does not need to ask what happened before it began, nor care to ask what happened after it concluded. When we have heard a complete story through to the end, we know all that there is to tell. When a play like *Othello*, for example, has come to a close, the spectator feels that he has been put in possession of every fact about Othello and the other characters that he needs to know. No additional knowledge of Othello's career previous to the opening of the play would afford him any satisfaction, nor does he care to know what happens after the curtain falls.

A remarkable but successful violation of this requirement may be found in Sardou's *Daniel Rochat*, in which the curtain falls just before the decisive step is taken which would relieve the spectator's suspense. Whether atheism or religion is master of the situation, is a problem left for the audience to solve. It need hardly be said that no playwright of ordinary powers would dare try this bold expedient, or, having tried it, would stand one chance in a hundred of succeeding.

With an incomplete story, the spectator is left unsatisfied: he wants to know what happened before the play opened, in order to understand what occurred during its progress; he is not satisfied with the close, and wants to know what is going to happen next.

10. **Unity.**—The story must be unified.

This has been variously interpreted, but the most sensible view is, that all the incidents of the story must be made to cluster about a single central animating idea. One purpose must be seen to run throughout the whole series of incidents. If there are two series of incidents, they must be so woven together that, at the end of the story, it will be evident that one could not have taken place without the other. This constitutes the *unity of action*.

11. The Three Unities. — The French critics of the seventeenth century distinguished three separate kinds of unity: —

- (1.) The unity of action.
- (2.) The unity of time.
- (3.) The unity of place.

12. Unity of Action. — The narrowest of the French critics understood the unity of action to mean that the play should have a single event and a single hero.

13. Unity of Time. — Following an ambiguous statement in Aristotle's *Poetics*, the French critics restricted the time of the play to twenty-four hours. An extension to thirty hours was barely permitted.

14. Unity of Place. — This unity required that there be no change of scene during the entire play.

It is important to notice that the three unities, in their historical significance, were the invention of French criticism. From this

source, they were adopted for a time by English playwrights. At the present time, the terms no longer have any meaning, save in the historical sense, when speaking of plays written under the influence of the old rules of criticism. No one pretends to regard them at the present day. It is still convenient, however, to speak of the unity of action, not in the old sense, but with the meaning defined in No. 10 of this chapter.

15. The Story must be One that can be Acted. — Unless the story is one that can be acted out on the stage by men and women, it is worthless for dramatic purposes. It is not enough that it can be told or narrated; it must be *acted*. It must find its natural expression in those movements of the human body which tell of passion, emotion, and resolve. It must be a story capable of being told in dagger-thrusts, kisses, frowns, sighs, laughter, caresses, eating, fighting, and dying. If it can be expressed in dumb show, then it satisfies at least one requirement of dramatic construction; if it cannot, it may make a good novel or a good poem, but it will never make a successful drama.

16. The Story must be Suited to Stage Conventions.¹ — In the preceding chapters, the nature of the stage, its devices and its limitations, have been clearly set forth. It is upon this stage that the story must be

¹ See chapter xv. 3.

acted, and to the conventions and limitations of this stage it must conform. A story in which a dozen people are represented as present throughout the entire narrative, may be very pleasant in the telling, but it will never do for the stage, where there must be enters and exits to give life and variety to the scene. A story of the war, in which a tree is cut in two by a cannon-ball and throws a spy who has been hiding in it headlong through the window-sash of a house, may be the most delightful sort of reading, and yet be wholly impracticable for stage production.

In these days of "tank" dramas, however, the possibilities of stage effect are by no means exhausted, and some boldness in this direction may not go unrewarded.

17. Motived Incidents. — The story, when acted out upon the stage, takes the form of a series of incidents. Not every series of incidents, however, will constitute a play. The incident must be *motived*. This means that the cause of every incident must be apparent in some incident that has preceded it and serves as a motive for it. Every event must be seen to grow naturally out of what has gone before, and to lead naturally to what comes after. An incident which is introduced arbitrarily, simply for effect, is called *clap-trap*.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A PLAY. — MEANS OF CREATING INTEREST.

1. Interest and Pleasure. — The story must interest and please. This is the fundamental law of the modern drama. It is not forbidden the dramatist to point a moral, or discuss a social problem; but these are side issues, extra-dramatic effects, which he must undertake at his own risk. His first and his last business, as a playwright, is to tell such a story, and to tell it in such a way, that his audience will be forced to listen, and, listening, cannot fail to be delighted.¹

2. Novelty. — An important requirement of a dramatic story is, that it be fresh and original. Nothing wearies us like a stale anecdote, a joke we heard the day before. If the playwright have any originality in him, by all means let him exercise it in the invention of new incidents. Still it must not be forgotten that an old story, told in a new way, possesses all the charm of a new one. A certain interest also attaches to well-known events in history that compensates for their lack of novelty.

¹ This subject will be taken up and discussed later on. See Chapter xxiii. 2.

3. Variety and Contrast. — Monotony is the bugbear of the dramatist. In order to escape it, he must exercise all the inventive power of which he is possessed to vary the character of the incidents as they follow one another. Pathos must be followed by humor, wit by eloquence, "talky" passages by quick-succeeding scenes of incident, soliloquies by the rapid give-and-take of dialogue. The entire act should be a rapidly shifting kaleidoscope, presenting new features at every turn.

Variety not only destroys monotony, but it secures the powerful effect of contrast. A bit of humor is twice as effective if it follows an instant of pathos or even of commonplace. Brilliant dialogue seems doubly brilliant after a monologue.

4. Suspense. The most important means of arousing interest is suspense. Keep a listener in doubt as to what is coming, and he cannot help but listen. Suspense is the nervous system of the drama. In some form or another, it must exist throughout the entire progress of the story. At various points of the play, generally at the close of each act, it may be partially relieved, but it must always be done in such a way as to give rise to new suspense, or to leave one or two particulars still unsettled. Not until the last moment of the story should every item of doubt be cleared away.

This does not mean that the audience is

invariably not to be told what is coming. It is a curious fact of human nature, that we await an event with no less interest, and sometimes with greater interest, when we know exactly what is coming, than when we are left in ignorance of its nature, — provided the story is told in such a way as to arouse our sympathy. This is one reason why the best plays may be heard over and over again without losing their powerful fascination over us.

If the dramatist is sure of his powers, it is a very effective device to take the audience into his confidence, let them see just what is coming, and depend upon his skill in telling the story to keep them in a state of suspense. A successful play written upon this plan is sure of a much longer life than one which depends on mere surprise through unexpected incidents.

5. Surprise. — Nevertheless, surprise is one of the most potent of stage effects. An audience may be startled or shocked into a state of interest when no other device would be of any avail. Surprises are most valuable in light comedies, which sometimes consist of little more than a succession of startling incidents. In more serious plays, too sudden surprises give the story an unpleasantly abrupt and “jerky” character. The surprise, in such cases, must be in a manner prepared for; the audience must be made to have a dim foreboding of the impending disaster,

while its exact nature is left a matter of surmise.

6. Climax. — A regular increase of force and interest culminating in a strong situation is called *climax*. A dramatic story should be full of climaxes from beginning to end. Every act should have several lesser ones scattered through it, and should invariably end with one of greater importance. Toward the end of the play should occur the great climax, in the technical sense of the word,¹ i. e., the point at which the interest of the play reaches its highest stage. All the incidents leading up to a striking situation should be arranged in the form of a climax, growing gradually in force until the last is reached. The situation concluding a climax generally takes the form of a tableau, or stage picture.

The technical climax must be carefully distinguished from the catastrophe, which last — in tragedies especially — is often the strongest situation of the play.

7. Humor and Pathos. — Except in the lighter sort of comedy, the two elements of humor and pathos are always introduced in the modern drama. No one any longer thinks of writing pure tragedy for the stage, and, on the other hand, the most salable comedies are those which have a few touches in them of genuine pathos.

8. Where Stories come from. — There

¹ See Chapter xix.

are no rules for collecting stories. They must come from observation of life, from conversation, from reading, from old newspaper scraps, — anywhere, in a bit of life vividly told, may lurk the germ of a first-class dramatic story. Many dramatists will confess to having had their best ideas suggested while reading old and forgotten novels. Many more, if they could be made to confess, would acknowledge their indebtedness to French *brochures*. A good story, wherever it comes from, is a priceless gem, and the playwright who has a note-book full of them has the beginnings of a valuable stock-in-trade.

9. Character of Good Stories. — The best stories for dramatic purposes require few presuppositions, and those of a character capable of being implied rather than demanding explicit statement. The story must, of course, be of such a character that it can be symmetrically developed under the dramatic form. The drama is a regular, orderly growth, and neither a story which consists of a series of episodes following one after the other like knots in a string, nor one which shoots suddenly upwards to a resplendent climax, and as suddenly goes out in utter darkness, is of any value for purposes of dramatization.

10. Adaptation. — There are two kinds of adaptation: —

- (1.) The dramatization of a novel.
- (2.) The translation and alteration of a play written in another language.

11. Adapting Novels. — Not every novel can be successfully adapted, for the reason that its success may arise from features which do not admit of transference to the stage. The first point to notice in every case is the action. If the interesting portions of the novel depend for their interest, not on what the characters say, but on what they do, the novel probably has dramatic possibilities.

12. Adapting Foreign Plays. — This process, so easy to the professional playwright, is, for the beginner, almost a hopeless task. Except in rare instances, nothing but a large experience with the conventions of the American stage and the demands of the American public will enable the adapter to decide what portions of the foreign production will be effective. Some plays need only to be translated, with a little cutting here and there. Others, and by far the greatest number, must be absolutely reconstructed, the characters altered and re-named, the minor incidents invented anew, the whole play denationalized and worked over on the American plan.

CHAPTER XVII.

THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTION.

Exposition.

IN the preceding chapters we have seen what a play is, and what the elements are that go to its construction. We have now to consider the process by which the material is to be put together in organized form.

1. Making the Outline. — The story of the play having been decided upon, the first step is to make a rough outline of the drama that is to be. As has been said, every dramatic story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. These are known respectively as, —

- (1.) The exposition, or introduction.
- (2.) The height, or climax.
- (3.) The close, or catastrophe.

2. Intervals. — Names are also given to the intervals between the above stages of the story, as follows : —

- (1.) The growth, rise, or tying of the knot.
- (2.) The fall, untying, or dénouement.

The growth, rise, or tying of the knot is all that comes between the exposition and the height.

The fall, untying or dénouement, is all that comes between the height and the close.

The significance of these terms may be made apparent to the eye by means of the following diagram : —



a Beginning of the action.

ab Exposition.

bc Growth.

c Height.

cd Fall.

d Close, or catastrophe.

The word *dénouement* is frequently used as an equivalent for catastrophe. This is incorrect. It is literally the untying (French *dénouer*, to untie), and includes all between the height and the close.

3. Purpose of the Exposition. — Before the curtain rises, the audience knows no more of the story than can be learned from the playbill or programme. From this source they may be expected to ascertain only the names and chief peculiarities of the characters, the time and place of the supposed action, the number of acts, and a vague suggestion of what the story is to be.¹ Consequently it is necessary, at the beginning of the play,

¹ See Chapter xii. 2 and 3.

to put the spectator in possession of all the facts necessary to a perfect comprehension of the story as it unrolls before him. All this explanatory part of the play, before the real movement begins, is called the *exposition*.

4. Management of the Exposition. —

The art of the exposition lies in introducing all the necessary facts without interrupting the flow of the action.

5. Methods of Exposition. — The principal methods of exposition are the following: —

(1.) Prologue.

(2.) Allowing the characters to narrate the facts.

(3.) Arranging the first part of the action in such a way that it will tell all the facts while carrying on the story at the same time.

6. The Prologue. — The prologue is of two kinds: —

(1.) The spoken prologue.

(2.) The acted prologue.

7. The Spoken Prologue. — This favorite device of old English comedy — a few lines of verse recited by one of the actors before the rising of the curtain — has passed entirely out of vogue. In its latter days it lost its explanatory function, and served merely as a vehicle of social satire. A similar bit of verse or prose, recited after the play, is called the *epilogue*. Few modern audiences will wait for an epilogue.

8. The Acted Prologue. — The acted prologue is frequently used to introduce events occurring some years before the main action of the play takes place. It is generally a bunglesome device, and indicates that the dramatist does not have his story well in hand. Moreover, it does not escape the main difficulty, because the prologue must itself have an exposition.

The original form of the acted prologue was the dumb show, in which the main features of the play were acted out in pantomime. An example of this may be found in the play performed before the court in *Hamlet*. The function of the dumb show is fulfilled in modern times by the printed playbill or programme.

9. Exposition by Narration. — The most obvious method of presenting explanatory matter is to put it in the mouth of one of the characters. Thus the young dramatist, if it is necessary for the audience to know that Angelina is a foundling, will bring in two characters, seat them on opposite sides of the stage, and make one of them begin as follows: "It is a strange, sad story. You must know that one cold winter night, seventeen years ago, a basket was left upon my doorstep," and so on, until the story is told.

The impropriety of this method will appear if we remember that the essence of the drama is *action*, not narration. Scenes of this

character, even when broken up into dialogue, are invariably prosy and wearisome, and should always be avoided. It is not practicable entirely to dispense with the narrative element, but it should be reduced to the smallest possible proportions.

10. Spirited Narration. — A very effective form of narrative exposition is to make one of the characters, discovered at rise, describe the action supposed to be going on outside the stage. This admits of considerable action, and forms a good preparation for the enters which follow. The following is the opening scene of Meilhac and Halévy's *Frou-Frou*, in Daly's brilliant adaptation: —

Pauline is discovered, as the curtain rises to merry music, arranging a bouquet in a vase at L. The noise of a whip is heard, and she turns and looks off, R., through the arch.

Pauline. Who's coming now? [*Goes to the arches and looks off.*] Why, if it is n't Mademoiselle Gilberte and that charming M. de Valreas! What on earth can be the matter, that they are galloping in that way? Oh, Monsieur might have spared his horse. Mademoiselle always comes in first. Now he's assisting her to dismount. They are coming here! [*She runs to the vase of flowers again.*] How long they are! [*Turns.*] Mademoiselle must have gone to her room direct. [*Returns to arch, C.*] That's certain, for here comes M. de Valreas alone. How gracefully he bears defeat!

Enter Valreas, R. C., looking back.

Another illustration may be found in the exposition of Robertson's *Home*: —

Lucy discovered seated on a sofa, L. C., holding a note.

Lucy. [*Agitated.*] It's past twelve. What can it mean? [*Reading.*] "Will come in by the kitchen garden when I have watched your papa out." [*Looking from window.*] There he is! There's my Bertie! [*Kissing her hand.*] He's standing on the gate! He sees me! Now, he's tumbled down and hurt himself! Poor fellow! I know he's bruised. That nasty gate, to go and let him fall! Why, he's coming in at the window, and not at the door! What does this mean? [*Enter Bertie from R. window, limping.*] Bertie!

11. **Points of Effectiveness.** — Notice, in both the foregoing instances, —

(1.) That the scene described is a vivid and exciting one.

(2.) That it is one in which the observer is intensely interested, especially in the second illustration.

(3.) That it gives opportunity for action, emotion, expression of consternation by gestures, etc.

(4.) That it leads at once to an enter, the scene outside being, so to speak, immediately transferred to the stage.

Many striking instances of effective narration might be pointed out in modern plays; but they are placed, not at the beginning, but in the body of the play, after the spectator's sympathy has been secured. In other cases, as, *e. g.*, the long narrative of the last act of *The Bells* (an adaptation of Erckmann-Chatrian's *Le Juif Polonais*), rendered with so great effect by Mr. Irving, the accompanying action deprives the lines of their narrative character.

12. Exposition made Part of the Story.

— This is the only truly artistic method of exposition. It is also by far the most difficult, often taxing the dramatist's ingenuity to the utmost. In many cases where it appears impracticable, the fault will be found to lie, not with the method or the dramatist, but in the faulty and incoherent construction of the story itself. The test of a well-built story is not infrequently its ability to carry along with it its own exposition.

13. Implication. — The means most often used to make the action form its own exposition is *implication*; *i. e.*, the information is indirectly *implied*, not directly told. It may be implied, —

- (1.) By words.
- (2.) By action.

14. Implication by Words. — An illustration may be used to make this method clear: —

The curtain rises and discovers a gentleman and a servant. The things to be told the audience are, —

- (1.) The gentleman's name.
- (2.) The fact that he has come to call on the master of the house.
- (3.) That the master of the house is his intimate friend.
- (4.) That his friend is married.
- (5.) That he has married an heiress, and fallen into luxurious habits.

The direct method of exposition would suspend the action of the story while one character or the other gives this information. The following dialogue, from Augier's *Le Gendre de Monsieur Poirier*, will show how these facts may be implied in the words used to carry on the action; the action being in this case the call itself, and the determined effort of the caller to see the master of the house:—

Servant. I must tell you again, sir, that you cannot see the marquis. He is not yet out of bed.

Hector. At nine o'clock in the morning! [*Aside.*] To be sure, the sun rises late during the honeymoon. [*Aloud.*] When do they breakfast here?

Servant. At eleven. But what's that to you?

Hector. Put on a plate for me. . . .

Enter Gaston.

Gaston. What! You? [*They embrace.*]

Servant. [*Aside.*] A nice mess I've made of it!

Hector. Dear Gaston!

Gaston. Dear Hector!

15. Analysis of Implication by Words.

— Notice in the above, —

(1.) How the fact that Hector cannot see Gaston (a part of the action) is made to imply that Gaston is luxurious in his habits (a part of the exposition).

(2.) How Hector, in accounting for his failure to see Gaston (action), implies that Gaston is married (exposition).

(3.) How Hector's remark to the servant, "Put on a plate for me," implies that he has been a familiar friend of Gaston's.

(4.) How the natural exclamations of the two men in greeting one another are made to tell the name of each.

For further illustration, take the opening of the *Long Strike*, in which Boucicault introduces a meeting of the mill-owners, and makes the proceedings of this meeting serve to acquaint the audience with the particulars of the strike:—

Parlor of Seven Star Inn. Armitage discovered at table; Brooke, R., corner table; Aspinwall, L., second chair; Readley at table; Crankshaw discovered at door, R. 3 E.; noise outside; voices outside at rise; music.

Armitage. Have you dispersed the crowd?

Crankshaw. No, sir; the people are very orderly, but they will not move on.

Readley. The street below is impassable; the mob increases.

Armitage. Very well. [*Exit Crankshaw. Armitage rises.*] Gentlemen, we have to deal with a most perilous crisis. The workingmen of Manchester have now maintained the longest strike on record. The claims I advanced some weeks ago were, I confess, extravagant; but I hear that moderate counsels have lately prevailed amongst them. Let us hope that the moment has arrived when, by mutual concession —

Readley. I, for one, will concede nothing. The longer this strike is maintained, the more salutary will be the lesson. Their suffering, wantonly self-inflicted, will remain a tradition amongst similar combinations.

Brooke. I agree with Mr. Readley. Concession, to these people, is encouragement. . . .

Crankshaw. The deputation of the working committee is below, gentlemen.

Enter Crankshaw R. 3 E.

Armitage. How is it composed? D'ye know the men?

Crankshaw. Yes, sir. There's Noah Learoyd —

Armitage. The crazy enthusiast? I am sorry he is amongst them. Well?

Crankshaw. James Starkee, John O'Dick, and Old Sharrock.

Readley. These are the ringleaders.

16. Implication by Action. — An illustration will suffice for this also : —

While several persons are on the stage, a gentleman enters, and finds himself face to face with a lady. Both start back in extreme surprise, stare at each other for an instant, then, as they recover their composure, bow coldly, and the lady exits, while the gentleman glances after her out of one corner of his eye ; without a word being said, the audience has been told that these two characters have, at some time in the past, sustained relations to each other.

17. Length of Exposition. — The necessary explanations should be introduced as near the beginning of the play as possible, since, if brought in later, when the story is fairly under way, they interrupt the action and dissipate the interest. As a rule, the explanatory matter should be all in by the end of the first act, in a five-act play, or, in general, before one fifth of the play is completed.

A new character, introduced in the middle or latter part of a play, sometimes demands

further exposition. In such cases, a proper preparation for enter ¹ will convey all needed explanation. In most cases, it will be found inexpedient to introduce new characters after the exposition proper, unless there is a chance to double up.²

¹ See Chapter xi. 12.

² See Chapter xiii. 22.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTION (*continued*).

Growth.

1. Growth and Exposition. — The growth, or tying of the knot, has been defined as including all that portion of the story which lies between the exposition and the point of greatest interest. Practically, however, there is no strictly drawn boundary line between exposition and growth. The interest of the best plays begins with the opening lines. The action develops uninterruptedly. Whatever exposition is needed is conveyed, as was explained in the last chapter, by implication, and so forms part of the growth itself. It is convenient, however, to speak of the exposition as continuing until all the presuppositions have been set forth, and all the characters introduced.

2. Conflict and Plot. — As before explained, every dramatic story is founded on the conception of a character striving to accomplish some purpose in which he is thwarted by another character. This brings about a *conflict*, or clash of interests, which becomes more serious and more complicated

as the play proceeds, and forms the *intrigue* or *plot*.

3. Beginning of the Growth. — The growth properly begins, then, at the point at which the disturbing element is introduced. We have perhaps a quiet scene, introducing two or three of the principal characters. Every one seems fairly happy, and everything seems going fairly well, when, suddenly, in comes some character whose mission is to destroy this peace and serenity. In a moment all is turmoil and consternation. The main action has begun. The virtuous characters struggle to maintain their happiness, the villain strives to undermine them. Plot and counter-plot follow in quick succession, until the interest culminates in the climax.

An example may be taken from *Peacock's Holiday*, an adaptation, by H. C. Merivale, of Labiche's *Le Voyage de Monsieur Périchon*. Robin Swayne and Stephen Tickell are two young men in love with Mary Peacock. Mary being on a tour in Wales with her father, Robin thinks it a good chance to get ahead of his rival by taking the same tour, and so falling in with the Peacock family apparently by accident.

Scene : Exterior of an inn among the Welsh mountains.

Robin. [*Throwing himself on the bench.*] This afternoon! Then I'm just in the nick of time. I daresay old Peacock will ask me to join the party, and, once let me do so, I'll see if I can't stick on for the rest of the tour. Fancy being in a Welsh car with Mary Peacock!

Dear Mary, what a surprise it will be to her to see me! In London there was always somebody in the way, especially that fellow Tickell, my oldest friend. But I've got rid of him now; *he* never would have thought of following Mary down to Wales. He's off to Switzerland for his month's holiday, and thinks I'm ditto to Scotland. Hang it, how tired I am! Where's that beer?

Enter Stephen, R. C., with knapsack.

Stephen. Waiter! Pint of beer, and a bedroom.

Robin. [*Jumping up; aside.*] That voice! Tickell! Confound it!

Stephen. [*Seeing him; aside.*] That face! Swayne! Damn it!

Robin. [*Aside.*] I fancied the fellow was safe in Switzerland.

Stephen. [*Aside.*] I thought the beggar was snug in Scotland.

The clash of interest has begun, and the growth is fairly started.

4. Elements of the Conflict. — The conflict of interests is not by any means confined invariably to the virtuous and the wicked, although, in all plays of a serious character, a conflict of this nature is certain to be found. In comedy, the clash usually comes about through misunderstandings of various sorts, though the same means, if properly employed, will bring to pass scenes of a highly pathetic and even tragic character.

In the first act of *Frou-Frou*, Louise believes, up to a certain point, that Sartorys is in love with her. Notice how this misunderstanding results in a conflict of interests in the highest degree pathetic: —

Louise. [*To Sartorys.*] How late you are to-day!

[*Her manner must evince love for him and pleasure in his company. She motions to a chair; they sit.*]

Sartorys. [*Seriously.*] I suppose I'm late because I left home earlier than usual. [*Louise laughs.*] I'll explain. I was in such a hurry to get here that I started from the chateau at a full gallop; but when I got within a hundred paces of the gate I stopped, turned my horse, and for a whole hour walked him about the neighborhood. I came back to the gate three times, and three times turned away again. The fourth time, however, I did like all cowards when they make up their minds to be brave. I plunged in head foremost, and here I am, a little later than usual, perhaps, but still here I am.

Louise. [*Who has followed him with interest and laughingly, but now beginning to show her emotion.*] What was the cause of this hesitation?

Sartorys. It is because I have decided to say something to-day that I have wished to say for the last month. That is the reason why I trembled all the way here, and why I still —

Louise. If what you have to say is so very serious —

Sartorys. [*Seriously.*] It is.

Louise. [*Moved.*] Perhaps you had better wait —

Sartorys. Oh, no, I must positively go through with it to-day. Besides, before I speak I can gain courage by remembering how good you have always been to me. And then, your father authorized me to —

Louise. Oh, if papa —

Sartorys. He did! And more than that, *he said* I must first speak to you.

Louise. [*Deep emotion.*] To me!

Sartorys. [*Taking her hand.*] Have you not guessed? I am in love.

Louise. [*Scarcely audible.*] You love!

Sartorys. Yes! I love madly, devotedly — your sister! Gilberte!

[*Louise, as if petrified, at first says nothing; simply raises her eyes to Sartorys, then —*]

Louise. Gilberte !

Sartorys. Did you not suspect it ?

Louise. [*Breathless.*] No.

5. Main and Subsidiary Actions. — The story, if told in the most straightforward way, would, in most cases, soon be over with. It is necessary to prolong it, to expand it at various points, to give it variety and contrast. This is partly effected by the introduction of new characters at opportune points, bringing in fresh life and interest at the very moment when the action seems about to flag ; but mainly by the use of subsidiary actions, offshoots of the main action, but yet so intimately connected with it that the attention will not be distracted from the movement of the plot as a whole.

6. Example of Subsidiary Action. — In Act I., Scene 3, of the *Long Strike*, we are introduced to Noah Learoyd's dwelling. The main action of the play is the reply of the mill-owners to the demand of the workmen's delegates. The plain and straightforward telling of the story demands that the delegates be brought on the stage at once, and the result of their mission related. Instead of this, the writer skillfully introduces a subsidiary scene, as follows : —

Noah's dwelling. Gentleman from London, Jack O' Bobs, Tom O' Bills, Maggie, Susan, and two small children, and all the mill hands discovered at change. Clerk, seated at table, upon which is a bag of money, ledger, writing materials, and lighted candles ; crowd gathered round table ; murmurs by crowd.

Gentleman from London. [Taking L. of C., back to audience, reading list.] Susan 'Olland, two infants and von 'usband, hoperatives hon the strike; one shilling and threepence for the man, heightpence for the woman, and threepence a 'ead for heach infant; total, two an' threepence ha'penny.

Maggie. [As Susan is about to take money.] Stop! Her man is dead. Thou hast no right to draw for he, lass!

Gentleman. Dead?

Tom. Aye, he be as dead as a door-post.

Gentleman. For shame, Mrs. 'Olland! 'ow could you himpose hon the "London Central Strike Fund?"

Susan. Oh, sir, my babies are clemming.

Gentleman. Clemming? What does she mean?

Jack. Starving, sir; that's all.

Gentleman. Retire, Mrs. 'Olland, babies hain't on the list. *[Reads.]* Jack O'Bobbs!

Jack. That's me.

Gentleman. Full-growed hoperatives, one and threepence.

[Clerk hands money to Jack.]

Jack. [Turns to Susan.] Here, lass, take it. I can clem better than thee and thy childer.

[Gives money to Susan. Crowd murmurs approvingly.]

Tom. That's right, Jack, thou art a good lad, and as long as I have a shilling we'll share it together.

Omnes. Aye, aye!

Tom. But here comes the delegates.

Omnes. Aye! the delegates, the delegates!

Enter Noah, Sharrock, Staley, and O' Dick.

Noah. [Making way through crowd; stands by table.] We came from the masters.

Omnes. Well, well?

Noah. [Hands paper to Clerk, who hands it to Gentleman from London.] There, man, read it out, for I've not the heart to do it.

Gentleman. [Reads.] "The masters give you twenty-four hours to return to work. *[Murmurs.]* After that

time, every mill will be closed against you. [*Murmurs.*] No further communications will be received. Signed, for the Masters' League, Richard Readley."

7. Analysis of Illustration. — Notice in the above passage the following points, which may be laid down as rules for the subsidiary action : —

(1.) The scene is of itself an interesting one.

(2.) It is closely connected with the main action, since it shows the desperate condition to which the operatives have been reduced.

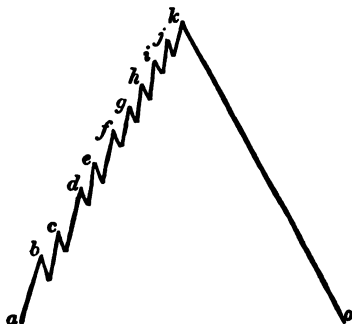
(3.) It leads up to the entrance of the delegates with the reply of the mill-owners, the hard conditions being made to seem doubly hard by the misery portrayed in the preceding lines.

It is perhaps worthy of mention, that the enter of the delegates is not as well prepared for as it might be. Tom's exclamation, "But here comes the delegates," is too evidently merely a device for getting them on. A word or two of anxiety earlier in the scene, on the part of some of those present, would have obviated this defect.

8. Episodes. — The playwright must be especially cautioned against the introduction of episodes, subsidiary actions or scenes which do not carry on the main action. However interesting an episode may be of itself, however humorous or pathetic, it should be ruthlessly cast aside unless it in some way

helps on the principal current of the story. To put the same fact in another way, whatever can be taken out of the play without interrupting the flow or decreasing the interest of the story should be left out altogether.

9. Series of Climaxes. — If the story grows continually in interest, the introduction of the various characters, with their conflicting aims, will lead to a series of situations and climaxes, which themselves will be arranged in a climax. Thus, if we employ the diagram used in the last chapter, the growth of Bulwer's *Lady of Lyons* may be represented as follows : —



- b* Beauseant rejected. Act I., Sc. 1.
- c* The plan of revenge. Act. I., Sc. 2.
- d* Claude rejected. Act I., Sc. 3.
- e* The offer of revenge. Act I., Sc. 3.
- f* Claude, as the Prince, suffers remorse,

but consents to marry Pauline. Act II., Sc. 1.

g The fight with Damas. Act II., Sc. 1.

h The Prince warned to fly. Act II., Sc. 1.

i Pauline consents to an immediate marriage. Act II., Sc. 1.

j Claude refuses Beauseant's money. Act III., Sc. 1.

k Pauline discovers the deception. Act III., Sc. 2 (*grand climax*).

The exposition, in this play, extends from *a* to *d*.

CHAPTER XIX.

THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTION (*continued*).

The Height, or Grand Climax.

1. Tying of the Knot. — From the preceding chapter it will readily appear that the business of the growth is to involve the hero and heroine in apparently inextricable difficulties. Each new turn of the plot winds the coils firmer and tighter about the hero or heroine, until a stage is reached at which there seems no possible chance of escape. Things have come to the worst imaginable pass. The ingenuity of the playwright has reached a point where, within the limits of the story, it can no further go. All the suspense which has been growing from the beginning of the play is concentrated in one grand situation. The knot is tied, and all that is left to do is to untie it as skillfully as may be. This point of highest interest is the Climax, or Height.

2. Rules of the Height. — The highest point of interest should meet the following requirements: —

(1.) It should be a direct consequence of the preceding action.

(2.) It should sum up all the preceding climaxes. (This is in case there is but a single height. See, this chapter, No. 6.)

(3.) It should occur in the latter half of the play.

3. Height as Consequence of the Growth. — This principle might perhaps be stated more practically in the form of a caution: Do not use a striking situation as climax just because it has elements of strength. A "strong" situation is a fine thing; and, once found or imagined, it should be placed where it can be laid hold of at a moment's notice. But, as part of an actual play, it will be worse than wasted unless it is the natural outcome of all the action that has preceded. The grand climax must not be tacked on at the end of a row of incidents; it must appear to grow out of them as naturally and inevitably as a flower from its bud.

4. Height as Summing up of the Growth. — In an artistically written play, the height will appear to gather together all the striking scenes that have preceded it, and to pass them in review. The reason for this will appear from the foregoing paragraph. The height is the direct outcome of the growth. When it occurs, the spectator rapidly traverses in mind all the stages of interest from the beginning of the play, and seems to find a reason for them all in the situation before him.

5. Place of the Height. — Throughout the growth, the problem of the dramatist is to build up the interest progressively by adding one complication after another. After the climax is passed, the problem is to remove the complications in such a way that the interest shall not flag. It will be readily seen that the first process is much more susceptible of expansion than the latter. For this reason, the fall should be much shorter than the growth; and, in consequence, the climax should be placed somewhere between the middle and the end of the play. In five-act plays, it commonly falls near the close of the third act, — sometimes in the fourth act. In *The Lady of Lyons* the climax comes in Act III., Sc. 2, with the disillusionment of Pauline. In *Othello* the climax is reached in Act IV., Sc. 1, where Othello becomes convinced of his wife's infidelity. The climax may be said to reach its culmination in the blow which Othello deals Desdemona: —

Oth. Fire and brimstone!

Des.

My lord?

Oth.

Are you wise?

Des. What! Is he angry?

Lod.

Maybe the letter moved him;

For, as I think, they do command him home,

Deputing Cassio in his government.

Des. By my troth, I am glad on 't.

Oth.

Indeed!

Des.

My lord?

Oth. I am glad to see you mad.

Des.

How, sweet Othello?

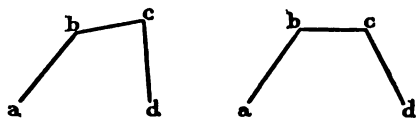
Oth. Devil! [*Striking her.*]

6. Multiple Climaxes. — The rage for strong situations, so prevalent at the present day, has led to the construction of plays in which there are two or more grand climaxes of apparently equal importance. Indeed, in not a few of our most successful plays, the growth and fall take up but a brief portion at the beginning and end; all the remainder consisting of a series of grand climaxes following one another as rapidly as the writer can manage to bring them about. Plays thus constructed must be regarded as inartistic, though here, as everywhere, success must inspire a certain degree of respect. It is this class of plays that appeals most strongly to the uncultured. The "gallery" does not know very much about art, but it can tell a strong situation as unerringly as can the parquet. A good play, from the standpoint of the gallery, is one made up of a succession of knock-down effects; and so long as the gallery exists as a paying institution, so long will such plays be in demand.

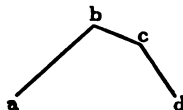
7. Management of Multiple Climaxes. — Almost the only rule that can be given for the management of several climaxes is, to make the last one invariably the strongest.

Practically, the terms "situation" and "climax" are used as synonymous. Many professional play-readers speak of a play as having numerous strong situations, when, in fact, the so-called situations are a series of climaxes.

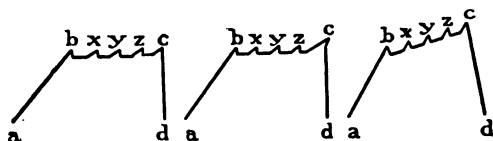
When there are but two climaxes, the outline should be like the first rather than the second of the following diagrams:—



The following form should be carefully avoided, as it constitutes an *anti-climax*:¹—



Where there are a number of climaxes, any of the following outlines may be followed, the third being preferable, —



The meaning of the letters in the above diagrams is as follows:—

- a* Beginning of play.
- b c x y z* Climaxes.
- d* Close.

¹ A climax less important than the preceding one, and consequently less striking.

8. *Illustration.* — A good example of well-managed double climax may be found in Bulwer's *Richelieu*. In Act III., Sc. 2, the conspiracy reaches its height. It is the darkest hour for Richelieu. François has lost the packet. The Cardinal has fled to Ruelle, whither is coming Huguet, with his band of traitors. To crown all, De Mauprat enters the Cardinal's chamber to slay him. The climax is reached when the former, lifting his visor, exclaims, "Expect no mercy! Behold De Mauprat!" But the resources of the dramatist are not yet exhausted. Richelieu escapes the conspirators only to discover that the king has turned against him, and that his power is apparently gone forever. Thus a second climax of greater force is brought about in Act IV., Sc. 2, where Baradas comes to take Julie to the king.

CHAPTER XX.

THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTION OF A PLAY (*continued*).

The Fall.

1. **Object of the Fall.** — The playwright may now be conceived to have brought the growth of interest and suspense to its highest point. But he may not stop here. The story, it will be remembered, must be complete. It must be carried to a point where there is nothing more to tell. He cannot, therefore, pause with his characters hanging, as it were, in mid-air. He must conduct the story to some fitting conclusion, after which the audience will depart in peace, — calm, passion-spent, and satisfied.

2. **Management of the Fall.** — The art of the fall, or untying of the knot, consists in removing the various suspense-creating complications in such a way as not to destroy the interest. The methods of accomplishing this differ somewhat as the ending is to be a happy or an unhappy one.

3. **The Fall in Comedy.** — In comedies (including, for the moment, under the term

all plays ending happily), the problem of the growth is to get the hero and heroine into difficulties. Hence the method of the fall will be to dissipate the clouds, either by showing that the difficulties are mere figments of the imagination, or by so ordering the incidents that the obstacles will be destroyed. It must be kept in mind, however, that, if the suspense is entirely removed at any one point, the audience will at once lose interest in the action. It is the business of the dramatist to see that not all the causes of suspense are removed at once; and that, as often as one difficulty is taken away, the presence of others is at once suggested. There are four ways of doing this:—

(1.) By interposing some new and unexpected obstacle.

(2.) By emphasizing some obstacle already known to exist.

(3.) By bringing to light an obstacle which is at once seen to have existed all the time.

(4.) By causing a new obstacle to result from the very removal of others.

4. Interposition of New Obstacles. —

This method is justifiable only when the new difficulty is in some way the result of previous action. Two men, for example, have become involved in a series of difficulties, ending in their imprisonment. They manage to overpower the jailor, and make their way through the corridors to a door which they

believe will let them into the street. The suspense seems about to be removed. They open the door, and find themselves in the guard-room of the prison. A new element of suspense now takes the place of the old one. Obviously, however, unless there is some good reason for the fugitives coming to this particular door, the device is mere clap-trap. If, on the other hand, the audience recognizes, as soon as the door is opened, that flight must inevitably have led to this one door, the incident becomes both justifiable and artistically effective.

In light comedy, when surprise is the only end in view, new and ingenious obstacles are introduced in profusion, with little regard to artistic construction. Even these, however, may be in a measure prepared for. In the following scene from Gilbert's *Engaged*, the entrance of Cheviot Hill is apparently the end of the suspense; but a new obstacle is interposed by Cheviot's announcement that the McQuibbigaskie has gone abroad. The fact, however, that *some* reply was expected, serves as preparation for the unexpected announcement:—

Minnie. [*Nervously.*] Oh, Belinda, the terrible moment is at hand. [*Sits on sofa, L.*]

Miss Treherne. Minnie, if dear Cheviot should prove to be my husband, swear to me that that will not prevent your coming to stop with us — with dear Cheviot and me — whenever you can.

Minnie. Indeed I will. And if it should turn out

that dear Cheviot is at liberty to marry me, promise me that that will not prevent your looking on our house — on dear Cheviot's and mine — as your house.

Miss Treherne. I swear it. We will be like dear, dear sisters.

[*Enter Cheviot, as from journey, D. F. R., with bag and rug.*]

Miss Treherne. Cheviot, tell me at once; are you my own husband?

Minnie. Cheviot, speak; is poor, little, simple Minnie to be your bride?

Cheviot. [*Sits on chair, R.*] Minnie, the hope of my heart, my pet fruit tree! Belinda, my Past, my Present, and my To Come! I have sorry news, sorry news!

Miss Treherne. [*Aside.*] Sorry news! Then I am not his wife.

Minnie. [*Aside.*] Sorry news! Then she is his wife.

Cheviot. My dear girls, my dear girls, my journey has been fruitless; I have no information.

Miss T. and Min. No information!

Cheviot. None. The McQuibbigaskie has gone abroad!

5. Emphasizing Known Obstacles. —

This is not so effective as the last method, for the reason that the element of surprise, unless the audience is inclined to be forgetful, may be wholly lacking. The usual means of introducing such obstacles is by some such phraseology as "one difficulty is surmounted, now for the rest!" Thus, in the third act of Robertson's *Home*, after Col. White has ordered Mrs. Pinchbeck out of the house, another obstacle is introduced in the person of her brother, Mountraffe: —

Mrs. Pinchbeck. Do you wish to insult me?

Col. White. No! Only to induce you to pack up.

Mrs. P. Can't I insult you ?

Col. No.

Mrs. P. Why not ?

Col. Because, you're a woman; and I acknowledge the superiority of your sex over yourself.

Enter Mountraffe, D. U. E. L.

Mountraffe. Pamela! [*Down C.*]

Col. [*Seeing him, aside.*] Oh, this is a very different affair. I need n't keep my temper now. [*After a pause.*] I won't.

6. Necessary Obstacles. — Obstacles of this character are those which naturally result from the characteristics of the *dramatis personæ*. As the progress of the drama moves towards reconciliation of interests, new combinations and clashes inevitably result. An illustration may be taken from Act V., Sc. 1, of Boucicault's *London Assurance*. Lady Spanker lays a scheme to punish Sir Harcourt by getting him involved in a duel. The plan seems likely to succeed, when an element of Sir Harcourt's character — courage — comes in, to give a new turn to the course of events : —

Re-enter Lady Gay, L.

Lady Gay. Oh! Max, Max!

Max. Why, what's amiss with you ?

Lady Gay. I'm a wicked woman!

Max. What have you done ?

Lady Gay. Everything! Oh, I thought Sir Harcourt was a coward; but now, I find a man may be a coxcomb without being a poltroon. Just to show my husband how inconvenient it is to hold the ribands sometimes, I made him send a challenge to the old fellow; and he, to my surprise, accepted it, and is going to blow my Dolly's brains out in the billiard-room.

Max. The devil!

Lady Gay. Just when I imagined I had got my whip-hand of him again, out comes my linch-pin, and over I go. Oh!

Max. I will soon put a stop to that. A duel under my roof! Murder in Oak Hall! I'll shoot them both!

Exit, L.

Grace. Are you really in earnest?

Lady Gay. Do you think it looks like a joke? Oh, Dolly, if you allow yourself to be shot, I will never forgive you; never! Oh, he is a great fool, Grace; but, I can't tell why, I would sooner lose my bridle-hand than he should be hurt on my account.

7. Obstacles Resulting from the Removal of Others. — This method, which requires some ingenuity, is always highly effective, especially in light comedy. By its proper use, the fall may be prolonged indefinitely without decreasing the interest. In the following scene from Bronson Howard's *Saratoga*, notice how Sackett's conversation with Mrs. Alston, just when it seems to have accomplished its end in removing all obstacles to an understanding between the latter and Benedict, suddenly leads to the interposition of a more serious obstacle: —

Mrs. Alston. Mr. Sackett, where's Mr. Benedict?

Sackett. [*Assuming a very serious air.*] Alas, my dear Olivia, you are too late!

Mrs. Alston. Too late! Oh, heaven! do not say that!

Sackett. Jack was my friend, my schoolmate, the companion of my early years.

Mrs. Alston. Surely you have not —

Sackett. I urged him to reflect — to consider our relations —

Mrs. Alston. You have not fought already?

Sackett. Tears came into his eyes, he grasped me by the hand —

Mrs. Alston. Oh, this suspense is terrible!

Sackett. "Robert," said he, "we are old friends; but you have insulted the woman whom I love better than ten thousand lives" — I think it was ten thousand lives, I forget the exact number — "the woman I love better than ten thousand lives; she insists upon the satisfaction of a gentleman" — I mean, the satisfaction of a woman — "and I shall protect her honor at the expense of friendship, life, everything that is dear to me." As we raised our pistols —

Mrs. Alston. Oh, heaven! as you raised your pistols —

Sackett. As we raised our pistols, I said to him, "Benedict, my dear boy, it is n't too late yet;" but it was too late; his bullet whizzed past my ear, and landed in the wall beyond.

Mrs. Alston. And your bullet?

Sackett. My bullet missed my friend's heart, by less than eighteen inches. He fell; a surgeon was summoned; and he now lies in the next room, in a delirious condition; a victim of his love for you, madam, and his devotion to the dictates of manly honor.

Mrs. Alston. He lies in the next room?

Sackett. He lies in the next room, [*aside*] and I lie in this room.

Mrs. Alston. I will fly to him at once. I will —

[*Goes to door, R. C. Sackett hurries, and places himself between her and door.*]

Sackett. Not for the world, madam, not for the world; the surgeon is with him this very moment.

Mrs. Alston. Oh, he would rather have me by his side than a thousand surgeons.

Sackett. I dare say he would, Mrs. Alston; but the surgeon has given strict orders that *she* — I would say that *he* — must be entirely alone with Mr. Benedict.

Mrs. Alston. Mr. Sackett, stand back; Mr. Benedict is suffering on my account. I insist on flying to his side.

[*She pushes him aside ; flies to door ; opens it, and enters, R. C. Sackett staggers to chair R. of table, and sinks into it.*]

Sackett. Oh, Lord ! oh, Lord ! now for an explosion !

[*Re-enter Mrs. Alston, followed by Benedict, trying to explain ; they walk R. and L. and up and down.*]

Benedict. My dear Olivia ! —

Mrs. Alston. Silence, sir ; not a word from you ! Go back to your surgeon, sir !

Benedict. [R.] “ Surgeon ! ”

Mrs. Alston. [*L., to Sackett, who turns his back, striding his chair, as she turns to him.*] So this is your “ delirium,” sir, — a “ victim of his love for me, and his devotion to the dictates of manly honor ” — oh, I could tear his eyes out, and those of his “ surgeon ” too.

8. The Fall in Tragedy. — In comedy, the movement from the climax onward is toward a happy ending. The audience feels that a reconciliation is approaching, and hails with delight the removal of the various obstacles which stand in the way. In tragedy, the situation is almost the reverse. The audience is, from the beginning of the fall, made to anticipate some dreadful disaster. The conflict is seen to be irreconcilable, death inevitable. The problem of the playwright in this case is, as before, to produce suspense, but under different conditions. He knows, if he is a student of human nature, that there is a horrible fascination in an impending calamity, and that, if vividly suggested and rapidly brought on, it will suffice to hold the attention of his audience. Furthermore, he knows, or should know, that this sense of fascination may be

both relieved and heightened by the effect of contrast. A sudden gleam of hope makes the despair that follows a hundred times more pathetic.

9. Happy Ending Suggested. — The method, therefore, of the tragic dramatist for prolonging the suspense after the climax has been passed, is to suggest possible means of escape from the impending fate. Romeo may rescue Juliet from the tomb and bear her away to Mantua, Hamlet may escape the poisoned foil and cup, Macbeth has yet one chance of life — he cannot be slain by one of woman born. It is unnecessary to go into details upon this point. Here, as everywhere, it is best that the suggestions of possible escape should not be arbitrary, but such as grow naturally out of the circumstances of the action. It is worth noting that, as the action draws near the catastrophe, a very slight hint of reprieve will send a wave of hope through an attentive audience. The spectator will clutch at it as the drowning man is said to clutch at straws. Those who have heard Barrett in the following scene from Boker's *Francesca da Rimini*, will perhaps recall the flashes of hope occasioned by Lanciotto's questions. Although it was perfectly obvious that no happy ending was possible for the two lovers, yet the sympathetic heart of the spectator persisted in hoping against hope that Paolo might make his peace with Lanciotto: —

Lan. Silence, both of you!
 As guilt so talkative in its defence?
 Then, let me make you judge and advocate
 In your own cause. You are not guilty?
Paolo. Yes.
Lan. Deny it — but a word — say, No. Lie, lie!
 And I'll believe.
Paolo. I dare not.
Lan. Lady, you?
Fran. If I might speak for him —
Lan. It cannot be;
 Speak for yourself. Do you deny your guilt?
Fran. No; I assert it; but —
Lan. In heaven's name, hold!
 Will neither of you answer No to me?
 A nod, a hint, a sign, for your escape.
 Bethink you, life is centred in this thing.
 Speak! I will credit either. No reply?
 What does your crime deserve?
Paolo. Death.
Fran. Death to both.
Lan. Well said! You speak the law of Italy;
 And by the dagger you designed for me,
 In Pepe's hand, — your bravo?
Paolo. It is false!
 If you received my dagger from his hand
 He stole it.
Lan. There, sweet heaven, I knew;
 And now you will deny the rest? You see, my friends,
 How easy of belief I have become! —
 How easy 't were to cheat me!
Paolo. No; enough!
 I will not load my groaning spirit more;
 A lie would crush it.
Lan. Brother, once you gave
 Life to this wretched piece of workmanship,
 When my own hand resolved its overthrow.
 Revoke the gift. [*Offers to stab himself.*]
Paolo. [*Preventing him.*] Hold, homicide!

Lan. But, think,
 You and Francesca may live happily,
 After my death, as only lovers can.

10. **Mediated Tragedy.**¹ — In plays where the tragic close is avoided, and the action which seemed tending towards a calamity is brought around to a happy ending, the two methods just described are to be found in combination. While stress is being laid upon the supremacy of fate, suggestions of possible escape are introduced; when the prospect of a happy termination becomes apparent, suspense is kept up by the introduction of fresh obstacles.

¹ See Chapter viii.

CHAPTER XXI.

THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTION OF A PLAY (*continued*).

The Close, or Catastrophe.

1. Kinds of Close. — The close of the play, with playwrights who have no conscientious scruples about their art, is a very simple matter. Kill the villain and pair the virtuous, is rule enough for them; and as soon as the play has reached its time limit, this is done, and the performance is over. Careful construction, it is hardly necessary to say, demands a closer relation of fitness between the end of the play and the play itself. Hence, we find three different kinds of close, corresponding to the three main classes of plays:—

- (1.) The catastrophe of tragedy.
- (2.) The close of comedy.
- (3.) The close of mediated drama.

2. The Tragic Catastrophe. — The close of tragedy is always a catastrophe; that is, the death of one or more of the characters.

The most important rule regarding it is, that it must be the direct outcome of the whole action of the play, and, therefore, be seen to be necessary and inevitable. An arbi-

trary, needless death is in the highest degree inartistic.

3. Death the Result of Transgression. — In order to satisfy our sense of justice and equity, a tragic death must be the result of some violation of law, social or divine. The transgression may be direct and conscious, as in the case of Macbeth. The catastrophe is then said to be a case of "poetic justice." Or, the character who commits the fault may do so unwittingly, and even believe that he is doing a bounden duty, as in the case of Lear when he casts off Cordelia. In many cases, the tragic result is due to a defect of character, as, *e. g.*, the irresolution of Hamlet. The important point in every case is, that the death be made to result from some action or trait intimately connected with the character which renders a happy ending out of the question.

4. Management of the Tragic Catastrophe. As tragedies pure and simple are in no great demand at the present day, detailed instructions on this point would perhaps be a waste of space; but one or two suggestions may be given. The playwright should remember that it is not the mere termination of animal life which is effective on the stage, but the associations that go with it. The aim, therefore, should be not merely to kill the character, but to make of his death a pathetic situation. This may be done by sug-

gesting at the moment of death the happiness that might have been, or emphasizing some noble trait of character that makes regret for the death more poignant. Compare, for example, the speeches of Paolo, in the quotation made in the preceding chapter from *Francesca da Rimini*, the last utterances of Othello, and the dying words of Marguerite, in Dumas's *La Dame aux Camélias* (Camille).

Few catastrophes are better managed than the following from *Frou-Frou* (adapted by Augustin Daly), with its characteristic touch of pathos in the last exclamation of Gilberte: —

Sartorys. [*Taking her hand, and kneeling.*] Oh, Gilberte, it is not you who need forgiveness; it is I.

Gilberte. Forgive you for — for what? For having loved me too well? Oh, that has been my misfortune; all have loved me too well.

Louise. [*Sobbing.*] Gilberte!

Gilberte. And that is why I die — so happy. [*Falling back.*] Oh!

All. [*Believing her dead.*] Gilberte!

Gilberte. [*Supported by Sartorys, who places his arm tenderly about her as she raises her head.*] Louise, where are you? Louise! [*Louise places a hand in Gilberte's, without lifting her head.*] Let me tell you — when I am dead — deck me out as beautifully as in the by-gone happy days — not in this black robe. Among my ball dresses, you will find a white one, you know; the skirt is covered with little roses; that is the one I want; don't forget, and you will see how handsome I shall be.

Sartorys. Oh, Gilberte! darling!

Gilberte. [*Sadly smiling; her eyes upturned to his.*] You see — still the same — Frou-Frou — [*Growing insensible.*] Poor Frou-Frou!

5. **The Close in Comedy.** — The ordinary close in comedy is the announcement of a prospective wedding, or the reconciliation of lovers. It should come at once upon the removal of the last obstacle. A common device is to reserve some humorous matter, or effective touch of nature, until the very end, and to bring down the curtain on that. Thus, in *All the Rage*, two of the characters, principal and second in a duel, go off the stage on some mysterious errand. The duel is averted, and the object of that errand seems likely to remain a mystery forever, when the duelist thoughtlessly unbuttons his coat, and out tumble half a dozen tin plates, which were to serve as defensive armor against his antagonist. The audience shouts with laughter, and down comes the curtain.

This device is more artistic, if it is prepared for from the beginning of the play. In Daly's *Seven-Twenty-Eight*, for example, a rich aristocrat makes inquiries regarding the original of a picture representing a young lady with a dog. The hopes of the family for an aristocratic connection are roused to a high pitch. At the close, it is discovered that the stranger's curiosity was directed toward the dog, not toward the young lady.

A good illustration of comic material left until the close may be taken from Wigan's version of Sardou's *Nos Intimes* (Friends or Foes).

Captain. Sure, he called you Robert.

Union. Yes, that's my name.

Captain. Then, you're not Jack Union, that we used to call Union Jack — supercargo in the Shamrock — twenty-three years ago, at Macao?

Union. Not I.

Captain. Are you quite sure?

Union. Certain.

Captain. No? Then, holy Moses, what am I doing here?

Union. That's a question I have been some time puzzled to answer.

Captain. [*Angrily.*] Why, confound it all, I don't know you from Adam.

Union. Nor I you, if you come to that.

Captain. Well, but thunder and turf! I've been here these two days, eating, drinking, sleeping, wasting my time, and making myself at home, as I should at a friend's. Sure, it's devilish unpleasant.

Union. It is, indeed.

Captain. Well, then, tare and ages! why did n't you say — [*Shaking hands.*] However, it can't be helped, after all. It was n't your fault; you are not a bad fellow, and I don't bear you any grudge.

6. Close with "Gag." — In the lighter forms of comedies, it is not unusual to close with the most effective "gag" of the piece. This generally leaves the spectators in a good humor, and gives them a saying that they are pretty sure to repeat to their neighbors as the curtain goes down. The following instance, from the close of Howard's *Saratoga*, will illustrate this method: —

Sackett. But here's a little woman, who *will* be more than a mother to me — more than a sister — brother — cousin — uncle — aunt — more than a mother-in-law — more than all the world beside — my wife. [*To audi-*

ence.] Ladies and gentlemen, — when I was a very little boy —

Effie. There, never mind when you were a very little boy.

Sackett. Young gentlemen, whenever you find a lady in your arms, or your heart —

Effie. Allow her to “remain in the place in which she originally fell.” [*Curtain.*]

Not infrequently, the last words are made to include the title of the play, as in the following close to Albery’s *Two Roses*: —

Grant. Mr. Jenkins, that union has been the dream of my life.

Lotty. You won’t part us!

Caleb. No, you shall bloom together, as on one tree.

Wgatt. [*Between them.*]

One, like the rose, when June and July kiss,
One, like the leaf-housed bud young May discloses,
Sweetly unlike, and yet alike in this — They are, “*Two Roses.*”

7. Address to Audience. — The selection from *Saratoga* will serve to illustrate another custom much in vogue, that of turning to address the audience at the very close. This is an abbreviated survival of the old epilogue. It cannot be recommended except in the case of the lightest comedies. It should, in any event, be very short, as the audience generally sniffs from afar devices of this sort, and begins putting on its overcoat as soon as the actors approach the footlights.

It may be said in general that, until American audiences are cultivated to the point where they will sit quietly until the curtain

drops, playwrights will do well to end their dramas with a surprise and bring the curtain down at unexpected points. A fine speech at the close is generally labor wasted.

8. Close in Mediated Drama.¹ — In serious plays which might involve a tragic ending, but which actually end happily for the hero and heroine, the close is usually of a "mixed" character. Some of the objectionable characters are put out of the way; most of the well-meaning characters attain the end for which they are striving. A death on the stage at or near the close is not common in plays of this class. In most cases, the character to be removed is disposed of earlier in the play, or his death is announced at the close, as the removal of a final obstacle. Death is not, of course, the only means by which characters can be put out of the way. They may be sent to prison or to Siberia, or simply made to vanish when they find their hopes shattered, as, *e. g.*, De Lesparre in Feuillet's *Tentation* (Led Astray).

Where the play is of a less serious character, the villain may repent and be restored to good society, as in the case with Ernest Vane, in Reade and Taylor's *Masks and Faces*.

9. General Remarks on the Close. —

(1.) In all plays, the actual fall of the curtain should be preceded by a situation of some strength, — a situation, that is, which

¹ See Chapter vii. 18.

will leave an impression on the mind of the audience; but it need not be a situation of unusual strength, nor should it be one of great complexity. The place for strength and complexity is at the grand climax, where all the lines of action are gathered together in a knot. The situation at the close can only be the unwinding of the last strand.

(2.) The position of the characters at the close forms a tableau, or stage picture, and should be indicated in the manuscript. The following instances are taken, — the first from Robertson's *Caste*, the second from Gilbert's *Engaged*, the third from Broughton's *Withered Leaves* :

1st. *The Marquise*. [*Bending over the cradle, at end, R.*] My grandson! [*Eccles falls off the chair, in the last stage of drunkenness, bottle in hand. Hawtree, leaning on mantelpiece, by the other side of fire, looks at him through eye-glass. Samuel enters, and goes to Polly, R. C., behind cradle, and producing wedding-ring from several papers, holds it up before her eyes. Piano till end.*]

[*Curtain.*]

2d. [*Picture. Cheviot embracing Miss Treherne, C. Belvawney is being comforted by Minnie, C., up stage. Angus is solacing Maggie, R., and Mrs. Macfarlane is reposing on Mr. Symperson's bosom, L. C.*]

[*Curtain.*]

3d. [*Arthur affectionately places his arm in May's. Tom turns, smiling, to Sir Conyers and Lady Conyers, and shows match-box.*]

Lady Conyers.

Arthur.

Tom.

May.

Sir Conyers.

[*Curtain.*]

(3.) It cannot be too often repeated that the close, like every other incident of the play, must be the result of the preceding action. The sudden introduction of unexpected, arbitrary agencies to bring about a solution of the plot (the *deus ex machina* of the classic stage), such as the discovery of a missing will, or the finding of a lost treasure, is contrary to all rational principles of dramatic construction.

CHAPTER XXII.

THEATRICAL CONVENTIONALITIES.

1. Importance of the Subject. — Ignorance of stage limitations and conventionalities is one of the most common of the obstacles that interfere with the success of the beginner. In the case of those rules of construction which are based upon artistic or psychological principles, the playwright's own natural sense of the fitness of things is often his safest guide. But, with reference to stage conventions, this is not always so. To the beginner, especially if his artistic sense is keen, many of the most binding traditions of the stage must at first seem thoroughly illogical and unnatural. Upon further acquaintance, it is true, they turn out to have a logic and a fitness of their own; but no mere exercise of reason or intuition would ever enable him either to forecast them or to dispense with them altogether.

2. Kinds of Conventions. — There are two principal classes of theatrical conventions: —

(1.) Those arising from the peculiar construction of the theatre, and the consequent conditions of stage representation.

(2.) Histrionic traditions developed at various times during the history of the stage.

The construction of the theatre has already been explained in a preceding chapter,¹ an acquaintance with which, on the part of the student, will be assumed in what follows.

3. Point of View of the Audience. — *The stage has but three sides.* This is a point so often neglected, that it is worth while emphasizing it by means of italics. The stage has a back, and a right and a left side; but the front is removed in order that the audience may see what is going on. While in a novel or description, therefore, persons may be represented as acting in a four-sided room, and as seen from any and every point of view, in the drama they must be shown as acting in a room with one side removed, and as seen from any one of a limited number of viewpoints. From this fact the following rules may be deduced:—

(1.) Every important action must take place in the centre of the stage, well forward. For this reason, strong situations must be made independent of scenery, unless the latter can be brought well down to the front. For example, a conversation between two characters before the door of a house, when the house is painted on a flat or drop at the back of the stage, will, for the bulk of the audience, be almost wholly lost. The case

¹ See Chapter ii.

will be still worse if the house is at the side and well back. In such cases, the best plan is to provide a *front scene*; that is, one in which a scene is pushed out on each side, in the grooves at 1 E. R. and L.

(2.) Care must be taken that, when two actions are represented as taking place at the same time, one does not hide the other from some one of the spectators.

(3.) The actors should not be compelled by any action of the drama to turn their backs upon the audience,¹ especially while speaking. For example, if A. is down front in the centre when B. enters at centre rear, A. cannot speak to B. without turning his face directly to the rear. The difficulty may be avoided by making A. cross to the right or left before B.'s enter.

4. Stage Distances. — The actual distances on the stage do not always correspond to the supposed distances of the play. In Shakespeare's *Richard III.* the tents of Richard and of Richmond are shown at opposite sides of the stage, while the audience is expected to imagine them a mile or so apart.

¹ This rule must be insisted upon, although the customs of the modern stage are rapidly leaving it out of sight. Many of the most pathetic scenes in plays that might be mentioned are deprived of half their effect by the fact that the audience is made to gaze upon the unexpressive back of the most important character, instead of upon his speaking countenance.

In modern plays this license is not usually taken advantage of.

5. Changes of Scene during the Act. —

This is a privilege so thoroughly established on the English stage that there is little chance for the unity of place ever to be revived. Nevertheless, a protest may be entered against too numerous and too abrupt shifting of the locality. The audience should in some way (besides the notice on the play-bill) be made to anticipate the nature of the change.

In pure comedy, comedy-drama, and emotional drama, and in all plays in which the movement is simple and regular, the same scene may with profit be retained throughout the act. Plots in which there are many complications call for more frequent changes. The change of scene is often useful where two lines of action are carried on together. Thus, in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, the scene changes from the group of characters at Venice to the group at Belmont, and thus the two are kept apart until the court scene. This also gives variety to the stage picture.

6. Order of Scenes. — The change of scene may be brought about by pushing out from the grooves at each side scenes that shall join in the centre, by dropping cloths from the flies, by pushing up flats from the dock, or by lowering the drop curtain for a brief period while the change of scene is being made.

The order in which these changes are made requires some little care : —

(1.) A front scene (see preceding paragraph) must be followed by a full scene. That is, if in one scene the flats are within a few feet of the front of the stage, the next scene should be brought about merely by pushing the scenery back into the wings, and so disclosing the full depth of the stage.

(2.) Care must be taken not to introduce elaborate properties into the front scenes. When the flats are separated, the front of the stage becomes a part of the full scene, and, as a consequence, chairs, tables, etc., will either be left standing at the front, or must be carried out by the attendants amid the jeers of the gallery. In Act V., Sc. 1, of *Francesca da Rimini*, Paolo and Francesca appear in a front scene sitting upon a settee. At the close of the scene, the flats are drawn apart, showing as a full scene the camp of Lanciotto. The question is, how to get rid of the settee. This was accomplished, in the representation given by Lawrence Barrett's company, by attaching a rope to one of the legs of the settee and hauling out coincidently with the movement of the flat. The effect, especially to those who could see the rope, and more particularly when settee and flat did not move at the same rate of speed, was decidedly ludicrous.

(3.) The front scene, for the same reasons, must not require "set" pieces of any sort

To see huge rocks gliding off the stage at the sound of the prompter's whistle excites a feeling of incongruity, even in those who lay little stress upon theatrical realism.

(4.) If a front scene, in the middle of an act, is to be followed by a full scene of considerable elaborateness, sufficient time must be allowed for the stage hands to get the stage set. The average time required to set a drawing-room or palace-scene is about eight minutes; but this will not serve as a rule to go by in every case. A little timing of the performance of actual plays is the surest method of acquiring experience in this matter, though much may be learned from an examination of printed plays.

(5.) As the noise made in setting a scene is sometimes considerable, the front scene should be of a loud and stirring character. All attempts at subtile character-drawing or tender pathos are likely to be frustrated by the banging of hammers and the rumbling of stage machinery.

7. Stage Entrances. — An "interior" is conventionally allowed to have as many entrances as the dramatist chooses to give it — as far, of course, as the construction of the stage will allow. (See diagrams of Interiors in Chapter V.) Thus a room will frequently be represented, in violation of all probability, as having three or four entrances at each side. Except in the lightest comedy, it is

better to restrict the number. The conventional distribution of entrances has already been referred to.¹

8. Stage Doors. — Stage doors, in interiors, are generally made to open outward. If the exigencies of the play demand that a door open inward, the fact should be stated in the manuscript.

9. Stage Traditions. — These are of three general classes : —

- (1.) Those relating to stage time.
- (2.) Those relating to dialogues.
- (3.) Those relating to costume.

10. Stage Time. — Stage time moves fast or slow according to the desire of the dramatist. Generally the supposed duration of events upon the stage is about five or six times as long as the actual period occupied by the representation. That is, at the end of a dialogue of five minutes, it is allowable to make one of the characters say, "Here we've been talking for a whole half-hour;" or, if at one stage of the play, a clock outside strikes four, it may be made to strike five after a lapse of ten to fifteen minutes. The justification of this license is found in the fact that the spectator, if really interested, takes no note of time. A tragic situation, or one in which the element of suspense is strong, may seem to last for hours. This privilege is sometimes pushed to a great ex-

¹ See Chapters v. and vi.

treme in the case of persons sent on errands, etc. A character will re-enter after a lapse of three minutes and recount adventures that would demand several hours for their actual occurrence. The skillful dramatist will manage to divert attention from these seeming inconsistencies by concentrating interest on the characters or the action.

11. Writing Letters, etc. — Letters or other documents written in the presence of the audience usually proceed at the rate employed in speaking very deliberately. The actor does not, of course, do any actual writing. Such letters should always be brief, as the discrepancy between the movement of the pen and the rate of speed in speaking the contents soon grows ridiculous. For the actor to speak at all while writing is in most cases a pure convention.¹

12. Time between Acts. — Any period of time may be supposed to elapse between acts. If the period extends to several years, however, the play is really divided into two distinct parts. When the long interval comes after the first act, the latter is really no more than a prologue. Most frequently it comes just before the last act. The time assumed to pass during the other *entr'actes* should be as short as possible.

¹ One of the most conventional and at the same time most effective spoken scenes during the writing of a letter, — the whole scene being a long monologue, — is to be found in Bronson Howard's *One of Our Girls*.

13. Conventionalities of the Dialogue.

— Many of the most important conventionalities of the dialogue have been already discussed,¹ and need not be here dwelt upon. However, a few cautions regarding the use of the monologue, the “*apart*” and the “*aside*” will not be out of place.

14. The Monologue. — In most modern plays, monologues are principally employed to enlighten the audience upon matters not easily conveyed in the way of action. They are the pitfalls of young and inexperienced playwrights, who are forever attempting to crowd into a monologue whatever they cannot compel their characters to utter in dialogues; nor do the old hands at the trade come off altogether blameless of this subterfuge. Used in moderation the monologue may be made very effective; but the beginner will do well to pass it by on the other side, reserving it as the last resource in surmounting what proves to be an otherwise insuperable obstacle to the action of the drama.

15. The *Apart*. — The *apart* is little more than a short monologue, its distinctive characteristic being that it occurs in the midst of a dialogue. It is at the same time something separate from the dialogue itself, and yet a potent factor in the total representative effect. An affirmative sentence, for instance,

¹ See Chapter vii., Nos. 7, 13, 15, 17; also Chapter viii., Nos. 4, 7, 9, 11.

may be made to convey to the audience a negative meaning by prefixing or suffixing a significant *apart*. Thus the unctuous villain: "Indeed, sir, you may depend upon me— [*apart*] to pull the wool over your eyes." Here the audience is presented with two contradictory ideas, the first belonging to the story proper, the second to the plot. The *apart* is intended for the audience; the audience alone is supposed to hear it. Nevertheless, an *apart* should never be addressed directly to the audience. On the whole, the *apart* is to be used sparingly. The audience should hear an *apart* and understand its value, and yet not be conscious how and when this additional information was given. To attain this end, two rules must be observed:

(1.) The *apart* should be worded in such a way that it will not obtrude upon the consciousness of the audience as an appeal to its interest or sympathy.

(2.) In the second place, the actor, in delivering the *apart*, should address his own inner consciousness — or anything except the audience before him.¹

¹ This pertains more to acting than to the art of play-writing. We take advantage of this opportunity to guard the beginner against relying too much upon an actor's ability in this direction. On the whole, actors have a great dislike for *aparts* and *asides*, and, if these are not very carefully worded, often find it difficult to do justice to their lines.

16. The Aside. — The aside is of much the same nature as the apart. It is likewise intended for the audience only; but it differs from the apart proper in that it is addressed to a character on the stage, is heard by him and by the audience, but is supposed not to be heard by the other character or characters present. All that has been said of the apart is true of the aside.¹

17. The Stage Whisper. — The stage whisper, except as a broadly comic effect, is out of date. Aparts and asides are now delivered in an ordinary tone of voice, the fact that they are not intended to be heard by others than those to whom they are addressed being implied by the action.

18. Relating Known Events. — Many conventions of the dialogue arise from the necessities of exposition. One of the most common is to make two characters relate to each other facts with which both are familiar. Thus in Robertson's *Home*, Mountraffe and Mrs. Pinchbeck converse as follows :

Mount. Did n't you get married ?

Mrs. P. To a man old enough to be my father.

Mount. What of that ? I thought he had plenty of the ready.

Mrs. P. He had n't a penny.

Mount. No, the old villain, so I found out when it was too late.

¹ See article by the author in the *Forum* for February, 1890, from which the above on the monologue, apart and aside has been taken.

19. Unimportant Dialogues. — Certain lines in every play are almost certain not to be heard by the majority of the audience. The dramatist must, therefore, avoid putting into them anything very essential for the audience to know. They are usually : —

(1.) The first few words of the play. The confusion in the audience during the first minute or so after the curtain rises renders it impossible for any except those in the front rows to hear what is said on the stage. Many dramatists make a practice of throwing in at the beginning a short lively scene of no relevancy whatever to the rest of the play just to get the audience quiet.

(2.) The lines following a "laugh" or a round of applause. These places the dramatist cannot always anticipate, and plays sometimes require remodelling simply because the "laugh" comes in at unexpected points.

20. Costume. — Only when absolutely necessary to the character or movement of the play need the costumes of the actors be described in the manuscript. For instance, the mere statement "eccentric costume" will usually suffice for all cases of grotesque variations from the conventional.

An actor should not, in general, be required to do anything on the stage which will disturb his "make up." Actors do not like to wash their hands on the stage, rumple their hair, wipe their eyes, etc.

The personal likes and dislikes of the actors in the cast, so far as they can be ascertained, must be kept constantly in mind. Two similar characters should be avoided. In case there are two characters of about the same ability, the part of one should not be allowed to fall in strength below that of the other. Stage superstitions must also be looked after. They may be learned from a five minutes' conversation with any actor. The writer knows of one play that was rejected because a character in it was made to remark to another that he "would meet him in *thirteen* minutes."

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOW TO WRITE A PLAY.

Blocking Out.

1. Getting to Work. — The theoretical construction of a play has been set forth in the preceding chapters. Let us now consider the process actually pursued by the playwright in putting his material into shape. We will suppose that the young author has been given a commission to write a light comedy for a stock company with from eight to ten characters, including servants, etc. His only instructions are, that there shall be plenty of incidents and a little chance for the emotional on the part of the leading lady.

If the playwright is acquainted with the company, he will probably arrange his characters to fit the personal peculiarities of the actors, so that each one may be given an opportunity to display his best points. A play written on commission, with full knowledge of those who are to play it, thus has a great advantage over one written at hap-hazard. On the other hand, a play written for a special company may not fit any other, and hence may not be so salable as one constructed on a more flexible plan.

2. Selection of the Story. — The first act of the playwright will be to find a suitable story. He will turn, we may suppose, to his scrap-book, or index rerum, or whatever receptacle he may have for stray ideas; and will there find, perhaps, some such crude outline as this: —

“A young woman and an elderly woman in love with the same man.”

3. Expansion of the Story. — This is at once seen to be a good basis for a story; but, of course, it needs filling out. In the first place, it provides for but three characters, a gentleman and two ladies. A little reflection on the complications that are likely to arise will suggest that the conflict may be heightened by adding a male character who is in love with the elderly lady, and whom the elderly lady greatly respects, though she does not love him. There is a good reason for this in the necessity usually found in comedy, of pairing off the principal characters at the close. If one of the ladies gets the object of her choice, the second may consent to accept the other man. Locating the story, for the nonce, in France, and giving names to the characters, the plot now runs in this way: —

“Léonie (the young woman) and the Countess (the elderly lady), are in love with Henri. Gustave is in love with the Countess, who greatly respects him, and might marry him were it not for Henri. In the end Léonie

gets Henri, and the Countess accepts Gustave."

4. Questions and Answers. — Pondering over this story will probably suggest the following questions and answers: —

(1.) *Qu.* How can the conflict of interests between Léonie and the Countess be made more complex?

Ans. By making Léonie some relative of the Countess, say a niece, and her *protégée* as well.

(2.) *Qu.* In what way can the Countess and Léonie be made to show their love for Henri?

Ans. Suppose Henri to be in some serious danger. Then each can use her best efforts to extricate him. He will thus be under obligation to the one who saves his life. If this one is not the woman he loves, still further complication will ensue.

(3.) *Qu.* What shall be the peril to which Henri is exposed?

Ans. Make him a fugitive from justice, say a conspirator against the government. Have him take refuge in the Countess's house, at her desire, and remain there in disguise. This will bring him in contact with all the other characters. It will also give Léonie a chance to fall in love with him without knowing who he really is, and so open the way to several interesting situations. An officer of the government may come with a company of soldiers to the house to arrest him.

(4.) *Qu.* How shall the Countess conduct herself toward Gustave ?

Ans. The Countess respects Gustave, and, as she is to accept him in the end, she had better be made to show that she has, at the bottom of her heart, some fondness for him. During the play, however, she will probably find him in the way, and she may even ask him to sacrifice himself for Henri.

(5.) *Qu.* What shall be the relations between the Countess and Léonie ?

Ans. The Countess loves her *protégée*, and is in duty bound to regard her interests. This gives an opportunity for two fine situations, — one when the Countess discovers that Léonie is in love with Henri ; another, when she discovers that Henri is in love with Léonie, but thinks himself bound to the Countess because the latter has saved his life. This leaves the Countess struggling between equally unpleasant alternatives.

(6.) *Qu.* How can the Countess be made to hope for success against the younger charms of Léonie ?

Ans. Make Gustave a young man, say twenty-five. If Gustave can love her, why should not Henri do the same ? She may even experiment, so to speak, on Gustave, and so arouse false hopes in his heart. This gives a chance for a capital comic situation, in which the Countess, delighted to find that she can be loved by a young man, and therefore

is still a formidable rival to Léonie, encourages poor Gustave to declare himself.

(7.) *Qu.* Shall Léonie know who Henri really is?

Ans. It will be better to have Léonie think at first that Henri is actually a servant. Several amusing situations may be made out of this misunderstanding.

5. Importance of Taking Notes. — This process of question and answer should be carried on until all possible complications have been exhausted. Naturally, many ideas will suggest themselves which will afterwards turn out to be impracticable; strong situations will be imagined, which, as the story develops, will be found out of harmony with the rest of the plot. All these superfluous suggestions will, at the proper time, be thrown aside as useless; but, at the beginning, the playwright should jot down everything, helter-skelter, just as it comes into his head. The imagination is never so lively as when it is upon the track of a new idea. All sorts of characters, scenes, and situations, throng through the mind. What particular images are destined to be fixed, and what thrown away, the playwright cannot at this point determine. Moreover, a good situation is always valuable property, and may form the nucleus of another play. It not infrequently happens that a playwright, while blocking out a play upon a plot already half completed,

will chance upon some new idea for which he will abandon all that he has previously accomplished.

6. Arranging the Material. — When the playwright finds the first rush of imagination beginning to flag somewhat, he may set about the work of putting the material into systematic order. If his brain has been actively at work, the pages of his note-book will probably present a chaotic mass of suggestions regarding characters, names, situations, dialogue, scenery, stage-setting, and even costume. From these he may at first pick out whatever seems available, under the following heads: —

(1.) Characters.

(2.) Situations.

As these are brought together in their proper order, careful judgment must be exercised to choose what is most suitable to the plot, so far as it has developed itself. New ideas will also probably occur, which may now be set down in their rightful connection.

7. Characters. — These, as has already been pointed out, are not to be selected arbitrarily, but with due reference to the action and the part they are to play in it. Supposing the proper care to have been observed, the following may be the form which the notes will take: —

(1.) *The Countess D'Autreval.* Leading lady. Aged 32. Dashing, self-possessed, full of wit, resource, and finesse. Capable of out-

witting any number of government spies. Generous enough to forgive Léonie for loving Henri, but not the sort of woman to give up without a struggle. Deeply infatuated with Henri, but retaining great admiration for Gustave.

(2.) *Léonie de la Villegontier*. Ingénue, aged 16. An orphan, and *protégée* of the Countess. Innocent, impulsive and indiscreet. The kind to fall in love at first sight.

(3.) *Henri de Flavigneul*. Lover, aged 22. Brave, reckless and impulsive. (The offense for which he has been condemned to death is perhaps some reckless act of generosity misconstrued as conspiracy.) Is in disguise as the Countess's groom and goes by the name of Charles.

(4.) *Gustave de Grignon*, Comedian (with touch of sentiment). Aged 25. Tries to be brave in order to please the Countess, but has a natural shrinking from danger. He imagines all sorts of perilous situations in which he wins the favor of the Countess by his courage, but when the actual trial comes he wavers. At the last critical moment his native manhood asserts itself and he becomes a hero. (*Suggestion*: For humorous effect, he might pretend to have inherited two different natures; one, of caution, from his father; another, of reckless daring, from his mother.)

(5.) *Baron de Montrichard*. Heavy, aged 45. General in the French army. Sly, sus-

picious and relentless. Prides himself on his cunning. Very polite to the ladies.

(6-9.) *A Brigadier ; two Gendarmes ; a Servant.* These may be walking gentlemen. Perhaps the first may be given a few lines.

8. Synopsis of Situations. — These may be set down in any order at first, and afterwards arranged, but it will save time if the order of the story is followed as nearly as it can be anticipated.

(1.) Léonie, believing Henri to be an ordinary servant, is indignant at what she considers his presumption, and tries to make him "keep his place."

(2.) Léonie while out riding is run away with by her horse. Her life is saved by Henri, who is in attendance upon her as groom. Léonie is angry at Henri's familiarity, and he confesses that he is not a servant. Léonie proceeds to fall in love with him.

(3.) Léonie recounts her adventure to the Countess and ends by telling the latter that she is in love with Henri. Situation for the Countess, in which she displays contending emotions.

(4.) The Countess in doubt whether she is young enough to capture Henri. Gustave shows some signs of emotion. The Countess leads him on to make a proposal. The Countess shows great delight, which Gustave interprets as a favorable answer.

(5.) The Baron has come to arrest Henri.

The latter, in his disguise as servant, waits upon the Baron. The Baron offers him a bribe to tell where Henri is concealed, and Henri accepts the money.

(6.) The Countess defies the Baron to find Henri.

(7.) The Baron has an interview with Léonie, who, terrified out of her senses, unwittingly discloses that Henri is disguised as one of the servants. She implores mercy of the Baron, who laughs at her. Léonie's self-reproach before Henri and the Countess.

(8.) Secret joy of the Countess that it is Léonie who has brought Henri into danger. She feels confident that if she now saves Henri's life, he will be bound to love her.

(9.) The Countess proposes to Gustave to dress himself in Henri's clothes and allow himself to be arrested. Gustave's struggle with himself. He finally consents.

(10.) The Baron arrests Gustave, disguised as the groom.

(11.) Henri's gratitude. The Countess thinking that he is in love with her, confesses her love for him.

(12.) The Baron sends Henri away, on his own horse, on an errand, thus giving him a chance to escape.

(13.) Comic situation in which the Baron describes to Gustave the way in which he will be shot. Gustave's terror. He is about to assert that he is not Henri, but is re-

strained by the entrance of the Cc
Rage of the Baron when he discovers the
trick.

(14.) Scene between Countess and Léonie.
Léonie in despair. Henri has told her he is
bound to another. Joy of the Countess.
But, Léonie adds, it is only by gratitude, not
by love. Despair of the Countess, who re-
solves to give him up.

(15.) Henri returns. He has heard that
Gustave is to be shot in his place, and will
not allow him to be sacrificed.

(16.) The Countess gives Henri to Léonie.

(17.) Arrival of an amnesty pardoning
Henri.

In practical work it will be found advisable
to write down the incidents on separate slips,
which can be arranged in any desired order,
transposed at will, and supplemented at any
particular stage of the story.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW TO WRITE A PLAY (*continued*).

Rearrangement.

1. **Order of Work.**—If we may assume the process described in the foregoing chapter actually to have taken place, the play is now well under way. In its general outlines it has arrived at a definite form in the mind of the dramatist. The chaotic mass of suggestions has been purged of most of its irrelevant matter and the remainder has taken the form of a completely developed organism with a beginning, a middle and an end. We have as yet, however, only a skeleton, with here and there an occasional nerve or blood vessel. Enough has been constructed, perhaps, to show the possibilities of the play; it may already be seen whether it has situations that will make it live, characters that will satisfy the demands of the performers; but much still remains to be done before the rough draft can be made to assume dramatic form. As the methods pursued in the process of amplification differ much with different playwrights, no cast-iron rules can be laid down. Here, as everywhere else, how-

ever, it is best to observe some systematic order, and the following is perhaps the most natural : —

- (1.) Exposition.
- (2.) Order of incidents.
- (3.) Division into acts.
- (4.) Outline of scenes.¹
- (5.) Dialogue.

2. **Exposition.** — It is very important that the matter which is to be set forth in the exposition be carefully determined upon before the actual writing of the play begins. The young dramatist usually sets about his work by writing the first few scenes of the play. This done, he finds that certain unanticipated explanations are necessary before he can go any further. Now dialogue, once written, is one of the hardest things in the world to reconstruct. The writer finds no point at which he can interrupt it to insert his expository matter. As a consequence, he either drags the latter in, head and heels, where it does not belong, or, if he is wiser, throws away the whole composition and begins again on a more systematic plan.

Under the subject of exposition we may consider : —

- (1.) What is to be told.
- (2.) How it shall be told.
- (3.) Preparing for later incidents.
- (4.) Length of the exposition.

¹ Nos. 4 and 5 are discussed in Chapter xxv.

3. What is to be Told. — The safe rule is to tell as little as possible. In the first place, the story should be so selected and arranged that few presuppositions will be required in order to comprehend it as the action goes on; and in the second place, all insignificant details should be left to the imagination of the spectator, or simply ignored. In the case of the play under consideration, the playwright might, in his exposition, give full details of the past life of Léonie. He might inform the audience that she was the daughter of a rich merchant of Paris, who had the most extraordinary adventures during a street riot, and so on, indefinitely. Nothing, however, could more aptly mark the handiwork of the unskillful dramatist. These details would be wholly irrelevant to the story, and would add nothing to the effect that Léonie produces on the audience. If the spectators see a young girl who is pretty, interesting, and amusing, they will not care whether her father was a merchant or a hackman. On the other hand, details that materially add to the effectiveness of Léonie's appearance, and the strength of the situations in which she is an actor, should not be left out of account. It may be worth while, for example, to give the audience to understand that she is an orphan, dependent on the Countess for protection and sympathy, for this will both win interest for the girl, and render the Countess's position more

perplexing when the struggle comes between love and duty. Perhaps the following are the most important points to be brought out in the exposition : —

- (1.) Léonie's relations to the Countess.
- (2.) The fact that Charles, the groom, is Henri in disguise.
- (3.) The reason for the disguise.
- (4.) The fact that the Baron is coming (with a warrant for Henri's death) to search the house.
- (5.) The Countess's love for Henri.
- (6.) Gustave's love for the Countess.
- (7.) The names and some of the peculiarities of all the characters.

Léonie's love for Henri will probably begin during the progress of the play.

4. How it shall be Told. — As pointed out elsewhere, the best method of exposition is by implication ;¹ that is, by so contriving the action that the explanatory matter will at the same time be conveyed to the apprehension of the audience. This method, however, is not in all cases practicable. Where the fact to be explained consists of numerous details, or is for any other reason not easy of comprehension, a more direct method is justifiable. An examination of the seven points of the exposition, given in the last paragraph, will show that all except Nos. 1 and 4 can be embodied in the action.

¹ See Chapter xvii. 4, 5, 13, 14, 16.

(1.) Léonie's relations to the Countess will be easily apparent from a conversation between them on almost any topic. Much can be implied in the acting, by looks, tones of voice, etc.

(2.) If No. 1 of the synopsis of scenes, given in the last chapter, is used, Henri's conduct and manners before Léonie will indicate to the audience that he is not what his livery would indicate him to be. He can be shown wiser than his station, he can be made to quote poetry, pass judgment on art, discuss politics, etc., in a way that will convince the audience that he is masquerading.

(3.) The reasons for Henri's disguise, the nature of his crime against the government, the circumstances of his coming to the Countess's chateau, etc., will obviously be much too complicated to be told in any form except narrative. There are several expedients that can be resorted to, however, to break up the monotony of a formal recital and to give the narrative life and action.

(a.) The facts may be brought out not in one scene, but in several. We may have one or two particulars told in one place, then after a scene or two a few more, and so on. Perhaps the first recital may be interrupted, leaving the hearer in suspense for a few moments.

(b.) The facts may be narrated partly by one person, partly by another; partly in one way, partly in another. For example, in an

early scene, the Countess may be represented as receiving a letter from Henri's mother, begging that she will protect him from the consequences of his indiscretion.

Later on, a scene may occur in which Henri, at the request of the Countess, relates the circumstances of his escapade.

The employment of a letter as a means to convey information which would otherwise have to be told directly, is one of the most convenient of stage devices, — so very convenient, that in some plays that might be mentioned, it has been absurdly overdone. The practice is ridiculed in Daly's *A Night Off*, where the Roman maiden of a play is, after many vicissitudes, finally reduced to "a letter on a stump." There can be no objection, of course, to a moderate employment of the letter as a method of exposition.

(c.) As before suggested, the narrative should give chances for dramatic action. These might be found in abundance in the scene just referred to. Henri could be made to relate with great vivacity some noble and generous exploit, to which the Countess, already in love with him, listens with great display of emotion, interrupting the recital at intervals by exclamations of sympathy.

(4.) The coming of the Baron may be announced to Henri by the Countess, as a reason why he should preserve greater discretion; and the fact that he has been condemned to

death may be read by some one in a newspaper paragraph.

(5.) The actress who takes the part of the Countess may be depended upon, if she knows her business, to show her feeling toward Henri, even without the saying of a word. It will be well, of course, to provide scenes in which this opportunity will be given her, and as this is an important factor in the play, it may be well to give the Countess a few lines of soliloquy that will remove all chance of doubt.

(6.) The remark made in the preceding paragraph will apply here also; that is, Gustave may be allowed to indicate his passion by his actions; but a more definite statement of the situation is preferable.

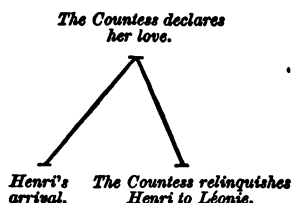
(7.) The way in which the names and characteristics of the personages are told should be varied as much as possible. Henri can, of course, be addressed as Charles by Léonie, and as Henri by the Countess. His full name may be read by the Countess in the letter, or it may occur in the newspaper paragraph announcing his condemnation. Gustave, upon his first entry, may be announced by a servant. The Baron's name in full can be mentioned by the Countess when warning Henri of his approach. The announcement of the name may, in all except the case of Gustave, be accompanied by some word or phrase descriptive of character; as, for example, the

Countess may say, "Léonie, foolish girl, what are you doing?" or, "Henri, impulsive as ever, I see," or, "Look out for the Baron de Montrichard; he is a cunning old fox," etc.

5. Preparing for Later Incidents. — It is an excellent plan to introduce into the very beginning of the play matter which will serve as preparation for incidents occurring much later. It is true of all plays, but especially true of comedy, that the spectator experiences a peculiar delight when, at the close, he finds an incident directly resulting from some fact made prominent at the beginning. Thus, in the *Lady of Lyons*, Pauline is represented as receiving flowers from some unknown source. This fact is simply noted as something mysterious. Later on we learn that they are sent by Claude Melnotte. In the play in hand, the last incident is to be the arrival of the amnesty that secures Henri's freedom. It will be advisable, therefore, in perhaps the first scene, to introduce some reference to an expected amnesty. It may perhaps be referred to in the letter, which the Countess receives from Henri's mother, as something hoped for.

6. Length of the Exposition. — As has been said, the exposition should be over with at least by the time one fifth of the play has been performed. If the incidents in the series given in the last chapter are about equidistant, the exposition should not go beyond No. 3.

7. Order of Incidents. — The general order of incidents will be apparent, of course, from the trend of the story, but many will be found which seemingly might occur in one place as well as another. To determine whether the proper order of incidents has been observed in the first rough outline, it will be well to settle, first of all, what is to be the grand climax. The end will, of course, be the union of Léonie and Henri, and the pardon of the latter. Consequently, the grand climax must come at the point where this conclusion seems most hopeless, the point at which most obstacles have collected. A careful consideration of the synopsis of situations will show that No. 11 best answers this requirement. At that point, Henri seems pledged to accept the Countess's love, while Léonie seems to have forfeited all claim to his regard. The plot may be represented by the following diagram: —



The proper arrangement of the incidents requires: —

- (1.) That all up to the point where the

Countess tells Henri of her love should be of the nature of complication¹; all from the point to the close, of the nature of solution.²

(2.) That the incidents in the growth be arranged to form a climax, each situation being stronger than the preceding.

(3.) That the incidents after the climax, while they serve to untie the knot, be so arranged that not all the suspense shall be destroyed until the very close.

The student should carefully examine the synopsis of situations in the preceding chapter, — observe whether the order given satisfies the above requirements, and try various arrangements until the best order is settled upon.

8. Incidents not Represented on the Stage. — Among the incidents will probably be found some which are not suitable for stage representation. These may either be thrown out altogether, or, if too good to be rejected, may be related by some one of the participants. Thus incident No. 2, that of Léonie's being saved by Henri, is at once seen to be unavailable for scenic purposes. It is nevertheless an effective incident, and one not to be lightly thrown away. It may be retained by putting the recital of the rescue in the mouth of Léonie, who can tell the Countess a dramatic story ending with the confession of her love for Henri.

¹ See Chapter xviii.

² See Chapter xx.

9. Division into Acts. — As pointed at elsewhere,¹ the division into acts is purely conventional, and so differs from the division into exposition, growth, etc., which is entirely logical and natural. Nevertheless, from a practical point of view the first is the most important. Good plays may be written (and have been written) by men who have never heard of the theoretical divisions; but ignorance of the meaning and principles of the division into acts would mean inevitable failure. General usage regarding the number of acts proper to various kinds of plays has already been given.² We have here to consider the act in its relation to the progress of the story.

10. Principles of Division. — At the end of the act, the curtain falls. This means: —

(1.) That one division of the play has come to an end.

(2.) That (excepting the case of the last act) the action of the play will be suspended for a short time. Remembering that two great principles of dramatic construction are climax and suspense, we shall be led to the following conclusions: —

(a.) The conclusion of the act, since it marks a stage in the progress of the play, should be a climax.

(b.) Since the action of the play is to be interrupted, in order to hold the attention of

¹ See Chapter x. 1, 2, 8. ² See Chapter x. 8.

the audience over the intervening period, the conclusion of the act must be so arranged as to leave the spectator in a state of strong suspense.

This is especially true of modern plays. In the plays of Shakespeare, and in the older drama generally, the conclusion of the act is often a scene of no particular impressiveness, possessing the force neither of climax nor of suspense. In modern plays this cannot be endured. The curtain must be brought down upon the very culmination of the climax, and the climax must be of a character to fill the audience with an eager desire to see the beginning of the next act. For this reason, in the acting editions of Shakespeare, the acts are re-arranged, so as to comply with modern requirements.

11. Application of the Principles. — In the play we are considering, the point at which the close of the act will fall will be determined approximately by the number of acts into which the playwright decides to divide it. If he is writing the play to order, he will probably receive instructions to provide for a certain number of acts according to the fancy of the person for whom it is written. If he is writing upon speculation, or is at liberty to decide for himself, he will probably in this case conclude, in accordance with the suggestions given elsewhere, that three is the proper number of acts for this

style of play.¹ The close of the first and second acts will, therefore, fall at points respectively about one third and two thirds of the distance from the beginning to the close. Let us first inquire at what point Act. I. may properly close.

Consulting the synopsis of situations, we find that both Nos. 3 and 4 seem to answer the requirements of position. The question then is, which best observes the demands of climax and suspense. A little reflection will show that No. 3 is inferior in both respects.

(1.) In the first place, the climax involved in the confession of Léonie is purely emotional, and therefore should not be strongly emphasized and dwelt upon in what is intended for a comedy. If the audience, during the *entr'acte*, are made to ponder upon this scene, they will get the impression that the play is an emotional drama, and so fail to appreciate it in its true character. The second situation, on the other hand, possesses strong comedy features in the absurdity of Gustave's position. It is really, therefore, for the present play, the stronger climax of the two.

(2.) The suspense is stronger in the second situation. The probabilities are that Léonie and Henri will come together at the close. The audience feels this, and is naturally in sympathy with such a termination of the plot. Suspense will arise, therefore, when

¹ See Chapter x. 8 (7).

some obstacle seems thrown in the way of this method of closing. If the curtain falls on the confession of Léonie the general sentiment will be, "Well, Léonie is going to marry him, of course," and the suspense will be reduced almost to zero. On the other hand, every event which seems to indicate that the Countess may possibly capture Henri arouses suspense. Gustave can love the Countess; why may not Henri do the same? A second element of suspense arises from the fact of Gustave's being deceived. What will happen when he discovers how he has been played upon? How will the Countess carry it off? All these queries make the spectator eager to have the curtain rise again and the story continue.

A precisely similar course of reasoning will probably lead to the adoption of No. 8 as the best situation for the close of Act II.

The student should refer at this point to the discussion, in Chapter xvi. 4, of the question whether the spectator should be let into the secret of the close. Its application in the present instance will be readily seen.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOW TO WRITE A PLAY (*continued*).

Filling In.

1. **Outline of Scenes.** — The next stage of the work is very difficult in practice, and one concerning which no very satisfactory principles can be laid down. The general movement of the characters of the play is now definitely settled upon, together with all the important situations resulting from their collisions. It remains to indicate in detail the successive steps by which the situations are brought about; that is, the actual entrées and exits of the characters, and their actions while on the stage. This may be best done by brief sketches or outlines of each scene in its proper order, noting in the fewest possible words the characteristic facts. The following outline of a scene in Act I. will serve as an example: —

Enter Léonie D. R. 1 E., in riding habit. Countess sends Henri to see after horse. Exit Henri, C. L. Enter Gustave, C. L. Brief conversation with Countess. Enter Henri, C. L., etc.

The word “scene” is used in this chapter, in a general way, to mean any small division

of the act, and corresponds to the French word *scène*.¹ Many playwrights employ the French principle in the process of outlining, as it serves to mark off the successive stages of progress in the plot.

2. Order of Scenes. — To determine the proper order of scenes in a play is one of the things in playwriting which must, to a large extent, be left to genius and experience. The most important matters to be observed are the following : —

- (1.) Connection of scenes.
- (2.) Sequence of scenes.
- (3.) Variety of scenes.
- (4.) Time of characters on the stage.
- (5.) Opportunities for dressing.
- (6.) Opportunities for action.

3. Connection of Scenes. — No scene should be written which does not find its explanation in some preceding scene, and form the basis of some scene that follows. To accomplish this result, the mind of the playwright must be continually running backward and forward over the skeleton of the play, — backward, to see that each new scene outlined is the logical outcome of what has already been outlined ; forward, to see what modifications it may effect in the remaining portion of the plot. In many cases, he will be able to “justify” a scene whose relevancy is not sufficiently apparent, by going back over his

¹ See Chapter x. 5.

work and inserting a line here and there; in other cases, the introduction of new scenes which seem too valuable to be thrown away will sometimes compel a considerable modification of all that comes after them.

4. Sequence of Scenes. — As the scenes are the logical connecting links between the important situations and climaxes, they are not to be thrown in haphazard, but made to follow a regular, orderly sequence. Each scene must glide into the following one without haste or jar. It must be the direct continuation of the preceding scene and a direct preparation for the one that is to follow. In short, every scene must be made to play its part in the regular rise and fall of the dramatic movement.

5. Variety of Scenes. — While each scene is most intimately connected with those which precede and follow, it must not be permitted to be the same in kind, or the play will soon grow monotonous. Every device known to the playwright must be employed to secure the effects of variety and contrast. The following points need especial care: —

(1.) Variety of emotions aroused.

(2.) Variety in number and grouping of characters.

(3.) Variety in method of exit and enters.

6. Variety of Emotions. — This means that there should be a constant change from comic to pathetic, from grave to gay, from

brilliant repartee to earnest sentiment. These changes must not be made abruptly (unless by that means some powerful effect may be obtained), but should shade one into the other in the most natural and unobtrusive manner, the change being made just at the point where interest is about to pass into a feeling of monotony.

7. Number and Grouping of Characters.

— The number of characters on the stage should be varied from scene to scene. Scenes in which the same number of characters are concerned should not be permitted to follow each other in close succession. For one soliloquy to follow another (unless some comic or burlesque effect is attained by this very means), is inartistic to the last degree. As regards the grouping of characters, the principles laid down in a preceding chapter¹ must be carefully observed. That is, those characters must be brought together which will best serve as foils one to another. The frank, impulsive character of Léonie should be used to bring out the finesse of the Countess. The vacillation of Gustave should be opposed to the reckless daring of Henri. On the other hand, scenes in which Gustave and Léonie are alone together will be of necessity weak, and should be avoided altogether.

8. Variety of Exits and Enters. — Methods of varying the exits and enters are given

¹ See Chapter xxiv.

elsewhere.¹ All of these devices, and any others that the dramatist may invent, should be employed to give variety to the stage movements.

9. Time of Characters on the Stage. — The length of time which each character spends on the stage must be carefully reckoned up, and pains taken to see that no one is given a disproportionate amount of work to do. The Countess, as leading lady and most important character, will, of course, bear the brunt of the action. No actor should be kept on the stage continuously for more than two important scenes; that is, not more than from ten to fifteen minutes, nor for more than ninety minutes all told, out of the usual two hours of total production. This is on the supposition that the part of the Countess borders on a star rôle. In actual star plays, the star is generally before the audience about ten to fifteen minutes longer.

10. Opportunities for Dressing. — If any one of the characters is required to change his dress during the progress of the act, care should be taken to allow sufficient time between his exit and his entrance for this task to be accomplished. The time required will depend upon the elaborateness of the change. Generally speaking, at least from five to ten minutes should be allowed. If a new *make-up* is also required, an additional margin of

¹ See Chapter xii.

five minutes, that is, fifteen minutes all told, will be necessary. Change of dress can of course be made in much shorter time.

11. Opportunities for Acting. — Volumes might be written on this point, and indeed it is not too much to say that right here, if anywhere, lies the secret of successful play-writing. Like most secrets, however, it cannot be communicated; it must be discovered by each author for himself, either by native genius, or by dint of observation and experiment. One caution may be of some service here: — Do not make your characters say in words what they can say more forcibly in action. When the Countess learns of Henri's love for Léonie, she should not be made to dissipate her emotion in words — a look will be vastly more impressive, and really tell the audience more than any words possibly could.

12. Dialogue. — After the entire play, or perhaps the first act only, has been thus outlined, nothing remains but to write the dialogue as it is actually to be spoken. What character this shall take will depend largely upon the character of the play¹ and the individuality of the author. In plays representing modern life, especially comedies, the dialogue cannot be too crisp and nervous. Clearness and force should be the principal qualities aimed at. Ornamental writing of every sort may be left out altogether, with

¹ See Chapter ix.

slight danger of marring the effectiveness of the play.

Some playwrights go to the extent of outlining the entire dialogue, or large portions of it, before setting to work at actual composition.

The method sketched in the preceding chapters is not, of course, the only one by which plays may be written. Almost every playwright has his own ways of working, peculiar to his genius and temperament. The process here set forth is intended to be merely suggestive, to lead the student to go at his work in a systematic way, whatever system he may finally adopt.

The student will of course have recognized, in the play just outlined, the main points of Eugène Scribe's *Un Duel en Amour*, which Charles Reade Englished under the title of *The Ladies' Battle*.

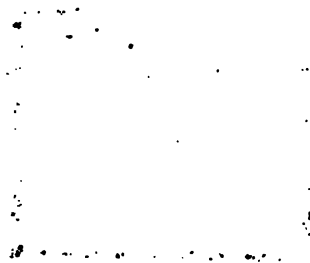
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